

**Consuming Niagara's Agricultural Landscapes: A Regional Assessment of the
Constraints and Opportunities for Developing a Sustainable Agritourism
Destination**

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my grandparents, Charles and Rosemary Ternoey,
for inspiring me to pursue studies in agriculture and teaching me the true
meaning of family at the Silver Dollar as well as the farm.

Abstract

Farmers in the Niagara Region have experienced worsening economic conditions in recent years due largely to globalization-induced competition and other exogenous forces. The subsequent agricultural restructuring process has prompted farmers to adopt agritourism as a means of sustaining their small family-owned operations because its activities generate additional income by inviting visitors to consume value-added products and/or services associated with the rural idyll. The number of agritourism operations continues to increase throughout this geographic area over time. Efforts to include agritourism in policy and planning documents are also visible in the *Provincial Policy Statement*, the Regional Municipality of Niagara's Official Plan, and various municipal Official Plans. As such, this thesis draws on the perspectives of agritourism operators, government officials (i.e., planners and economic development operators), and representatives from not-for-profit organizations as a means to explore agritourism as a strategy of rural economic development in the Niagara Region. The analysis identifies stakeholders' use of place-based development, entrepreneurs' knowledge of product, high quality standards, and the presence of strategic partnerships as industry-related opportunities. Several constraints are also made known; however, they are found to affect agritourism operations that are not part of the wine and grape growing faction of industry on a larger scale. Proactive planning policies, more effective marketing strategies, workshop-based education, and better communication between stakeholders might enhance the future development of the agritourism industry. Overall, it is argued that agritourism is a viable rural economic development strategy for the Niagara Region to pursue, especially if operations are based in wine and grape growing.

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AGCO	Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario
ANT	Actor Network Theory
BDT	Business-Development-Tourism
CAA	Canadian Automobile Association
CAFO	Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CTM	Creative Theatre Marketing
CSA	Community Supported Agriculture
GDD	Growing Degree Days
GFR	Gross Farm Receipts
GGH	Greater Golden Horseshoe
GGO	Grape Growers of Ontario
GMO	Genetically Modified Organisms
GTA	Greater Toronto Area
IC4	International Cool Climate Chardonnay Celebration
LCBO	Liquor Control Board of Ontario
MCIT	Meetings, Conventions, and Incentive Travel Opportunities
MDSF	Minimum Distance Separation Formulae
MFA	Multifunctional Agriculture
MFPS	Minimum Farm Parcel Size
NEC	Niagara Escarpment Commission
NEP	Niagara Escarpment Plan
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NOTL	Niagara-on-the-Lake
NSCTA	Niagara South Coast Tourism Association
NWPB	Niagara Workforce Planning Board
OCTA	Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance
OMAFRA	Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs
OMTCS	Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Sport
OP	Official Plan
OTC	Ontario Travel Center
PPT	Post-Productivist Transition
PPS	Provincial Policy Statement
R&D	Research and Development
ROI	Return on Investment
ROP	Regional Official Plan
RTO	Regional Tourism Office
SARS	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
TSRC	Travel Survey of Residents of Canada
TPN	Tourism Partnership of Niagara
TVTA	Twenty Valley Tourism Association
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
VQA	Vintner's Quality Alliance
WCO	Wine Council of Ontario

WCWG
WWII

Western Canadian Wheat Growers
World War II

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

I was born and raised in the Province of Ontario's largest metropolis, the City of Toronto, and became interested in agriculture after taking a third-year Geography course at Brock University, which covered the topic as well as its relationship to community planning and development. I must admit that, as a Torontonian, I have never lived on a farm or participated in any type of work considered "agricultural", except for a few times when I visited my grandparent's house – they own a cash crop farm in Chatham Kent, Ontario. I mention this because a number of people who participated in my research project made assumptions that I have some sort of connection with agriculture since I chose to study it. But, I do not...not really anyway. Nevertheless, I chose to pursue agriculture as a topic for a graduate-level thesis. I felt inspired when I learned how agriculture plays a dominant role in the global food system, and vice versa. My inspiration is driven by the concerns I have for the general public because they purchase food from the aforesaid system but are unaware of *what* they are eating, *where* it originates, and *how* it is made (Kenner, 2009; Pollan, 2006). For example, beef from cattle reared in Canada might be transported over 10,000 kilometers to a slaughterhouse and then processed (using chemicals) and packaged at a plant another 3,000 kilometers away before it is sold at a supermarket close to the initial farm. People's ignorance for this has contributed to an increasing number of persons suffering from food-related illness, such as diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol (Kenner, 2009). These illnesses were not as common when agriculture operated in a more traditional sense. Now that agriculture is capital-intensive in its production processes,

these illnesses are omnipresent and even directly affect some of my family members. I can only imagine how many other people share this concern for similar reasons. Thus, I used this concern and interest as a starting point for my Master of Arts research albeit it took somewhat of a different route.

My research on agriculture expanded (with the help of my supervisory committee) beyond my concern for the general public towards that of entire communities, especially those that are rural. Rural communities¹ in the Western Hemisphere have been undergoing rapid change since the 1970s as a result of agricultural restructuring and other exogenous forces (e.g., the globalization of our food system) (Ainley and Smale, 2010; Jenkins et al., 1998; Woods, 2011). Such change has threatened the viability of small family-owned farms because owners/operators are finding it difficult to compete with multinational agri-food corporations (e.g., Monsanto, Cargill, ConAgra, Novartis), which produce large quantities of food at a low cost (Ainley, 2014; Kenner, 2009; Woods, 2005). The vast majority of small family-owned farms must – or, better yet, have *little choice* but to – seek additional sources of income in order to survive (Khanal and Mishra, 2014). A popular option for them is a type of multifunctional agriculture (MFA) called “agritourism.” By definition, agritourism is “any recreational, educational, or leisure-based activity programmed on a working farm or other agricultural operation (e.g. plant nursery, mill) [that is meant] to attract visitors” (Barbieri, 2013, p. 253). Its activities include farm tours, direct participation in farming activities (e.g., milking a cow, pick-your-own fruits and vegetables), nature contemplation, on-farm lodging and food services (e.g., cabins, bed and breakfasts, wine tasting, culinary), farmer and supper markets,

¹ There are many types of rural communities, such as agricultural, resource, Aboriginal, and amenity. This thesis focuses on those that are based in agriculture.

roadside stands, and special events (e.g., agricultural festivals, orchard weddings) (Barbieri, 2013). These types of agritourism activities are capable of being more successful than the traditional route of commodity production and/or off-farm employment when it comes to generating income (Khanal and Mishra, 2014). They are also generally known to be sustainable (i.e. economically, environmentally, and socio-culturally) forms of development for rural communities (Barbieri, 2013; Sims, 2009).

Of particular interest are the implications of agritourism development for rural communities, such as the Niagara Region. The Niagara Region is one of the many locations in Southern Ontario using agritourism to adapt to rural change. Evidence of this is shown within and across the landscape as the number of agritourism operations has increased considerably over the past few years. Support for agritourism has also grown since it has been included in regional and provincial planning documents as of 2015. However, no one has been monitoring this industry – there are *no* up-to-date statistics and the opportunities and constraints for its development are largely unknown or, at least, very poorly understood. Thus, questions remain as to how agritourism is panning out in a practical sense and whether or not it is viable for the Niagara Region to pursue from an economic development standpoint. Accordingly, this research addresses the following questions:

1. What is the current status of the agritourism industry in the Niagara Region?
2. What lessons can be learned from this research that might enhance the future development of the agritourism industry in the Niagara Region?

The vast majority of this thesis is structured according to these research questions. Each question is discussed in a separate chapter for purposes of clarity. The first question is somewhat connected to the second because a few of the findings serve as a lesson to be

learned and thereby require subsequent recommendations for stakeholders to consider.

The remainder of this introductory chapter provides an overview of key themes present in the following chapters.

Chapter Two provides a literature review analyzing the concept of agricultural restructuring. More specifically, I discuss the various ways in which rural geographies in the Western Hemisphere have transformed as a result of political, economic, and environmental changes that exist often beyond the control of these areas. This overview leads into a discussion about the concept of agritourism and how it came about in rural society. The motivations for pursuing agritourism activities are subsequently explored, as well are the various places in which academics have studied this topic, some of which include the provinces of Ontario and Nova Scotia in Canada. Also, recent studies are explored even though their findings only indirectly relate to the twelve municipalities in the Niagara Region, which is the focus of this research.

Chapter Three of this thesis begins with the site of my case study: the Niagara Region. I draw on secondary data sources as a means to explain Niagara's geography in its most general terms. The content discussed includes population statistics, socio-cultural demographics, landscape features, and economic sectors. A brief overview of the regulatory frameworks that influence Niagara's path to development is also provided in order to add context before proceeding to the methodology section. The primary research method I chose to employ for this study is the key informant interview. The merits of such are explored in the latter half of this chapter along with the limitations associated with my data and the various challenges I encountered upon its collection.

The first research question is addressed in Chapter Four. Here, I utilize the data from

the key informant interview process as a means to analyze the current status of the agritourism industry in the Niagara Region. My findings are divided into two themes, opportunities and constraints, to get a perspective of how this industry is operating on the ground. There seem to be far fewer opportunities than constraints; however, some agritourism operations face a greater number of constraints than others. There also seems to be a massive amount of red tape when it comes to regulatory frameworks, as well as a number of marketing-related barriers. I argue that strategic partnerships are of great value to this industry based on the examples provided. Moreover, one municipality – Niagara-on-the-Lake – is seemingly exempt from the vast majority of constraints highlighted in this chapter. This municipality serves as a leader and, more importantly, provides a starting point for many of the recommendations outlined in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five addresses the second research question regarding lessons to be drawn from this study for agritourism operators and future planning and economic development activities that pertain to agritourism in the Niagara Region. It does so by providing four key recommendations. The first recommendation pertains to the rules and regulations of planning documents at the municipal level. I argue that these documents need to be more supportive of agritourism since most plans are some combination of being out-of-date, lacking specification, and not providing favourable conditions for the development of this industry. Second, some marketing-related successes, such as appealing to consumers' emotions, advertising "Eat Local," and joining the Niagara South Coast Tourism Association (NSCTA), were identified throughout my key informant interview process. I utilize these successes as a means to share marketing advice with agritourism operators who are struggling to attract agritourists to their operation. Education, mainly through the

delivery of workshops, serves as a third recommendation because many agritourism operators need to educate themselves about what agritourism entails before they set up an operation. Others can apply what they learn in a workshop to their operation or use the information to assist them in developing a product/service they are confident about. Lastly, I maintain that, through more and better communication, conflicts that arise at venues over the price of goods or services sold can be mitigated; indeed, if agritourism operators and agritourists exchange dialogue, they will thereby learn to understand each other. It is hoped that these recommendations can be applied in practice. I am optimistic that they can help (re) brand the Niagara Region, particularly its rural areas, as a sustainable agritourism destination.

The final chapter of this thesis serves as a conclusion. I provide a detailed overview of my findings and discuss linkages that occur between Chapters Four and Five. I argue that agritourism is a viable rural economic development strategy for the Niagara Region to pursue. Afterwards, I note the limitations of this research and make suggestions as to where it can go in the future if it is revisited.

CHAPTER 2:

LITERATURE REVIEW

The research interests of contemporary rural geographers have been shifting in terms of key themes and major theoretical and methodological approaches (Woods, 2009). There are, however, a number of “traditional” themes that can be identified as consistent areas of research by rural geographers over the past four decades, including restructuring, land-use planning, management and conservation, economic development, tourism and recreation, settlement patterns, culture and media representations, poverty, experiences of rural life, governance, and infrastructure (Woods, 2009). My research is guided by the first of these themes (but is connected to others in the subdiscipline) as issues concerning the viability of small family-owned farms have been largely influenced, enhanced, and magnified by the changes brought forth by agricultural restructuring. The goal of this chapter is to provide an overview of the academic literature pertaining to agricultural restructuring and the various ways it has affected the everyday lives of rural people in countries like Canada and how they govern themselves in their community. This will provide a context for original research carried out in the preparation of this thesis as well as the contents discussed in subsequent chapters.

The literature review is organized into four broad sections. It begins by defining agricultural restructuring and then identifies the situation where it has been the most disruptive to rural communities and small family-owned farms, which is the period after World War II (WWII). Section Two unpacks this situation in detail by describing productivist agriculture and its key characteristics as well as the changes (i.e., economic, political, socio-cultural, environmental) that resulted from this type of restructuring. The

purpose of this is to provide a better understanding of the context within which tourism and recreation and, more specifically, agritourism has become a common part of Ontario's rural economy in the twenty-first century. The literature review continues after the concept of agritourism has been discussed by reviewing recent studies that pertain to this thesis' topic. It is important to mention that, although there are no academic studies on agritourism and its use as a rural economic development strategy in the Niagara Region, some research bears indirectly on this topic. The literature review concludes by discussing gaps in the literature and highlighting the various ways in which this thesis will tap into a grey area of rural geography that has been left largely untouched by academic researchers.

2.1. Agricultural Restructuring

Agricultural restructuring is a key concept that has recently caught the attention of academics who study rural geography as a subdiscipline. By definition, agricultural restructuring refers to any change in agriculture that shifts established patterns of political responsibility and economic development towards new directives (Halseth et al., 2010). It is not a *new* concept since rural communities have experienced agricultural restructuring in the past (Jenkins et al., 1998). For example, the First Agricultural Revolution prompted rural communities to experience agricultural restructuring for it is when agricultural settlements replaced hunting and gathering with activities first recognized as "farming" (Barker, 2006). The Second Agricultural Revolution is another example of agricultural restructuring as a result of the innovation, enclosure practices, and changes in the distribution of land that happened in Britain (and adjacent areas of Western Europe)

during the eighteenth and nineteenth century (Beckett, 1990). Most recently, agricultural restructuring has occurred in the form of productivism. This latest phase took place after WWII in the Industrialized West (Jenkins et al., 1998; Woods, 2005; Woods, 2011). It has been the most disruptive to rural communities and small family-owned farms as many underwent a complete transformation in order to compete in an increasingly globalized marketplace (Jenkins et al., 1998; Woods, 2005, Woods, 2011), thus explaining why academics only recently became interested in agricultural restructuring as a key concept.

2.2. The Productivist Era

As explained, productivism occurred in the Industrialized West after WWII. Productivism refers to a “discourse of agricultural organization in which the function of farming was singularly conceived as the production of food and fibre” (Woods, 2011, p.67). Its central objective was to increase agricultural production (Woods, 2011). This involved changes to the founding structures of agriculture by way of intensification, concentration, and specialization (See Table 1). These changes were underpinned by state subsidies (Woods, 2005). They remained the dominant policy trend in agriculture up until the mid-1980s (Woods, 2005). As such, they are important changes to discuss.

Intensification is a key characteristic of productivism in rural communities. Intensification is defined as “the pursuit of higher productivity through the substantial capitalization of agriculture” (Woods, 2005, p. 47). It involves significant investment in machinery (i.e. tractors, combines, harvesters, etc.) and other farm-related infrastructure as a means to cover a vast amount of acreage per day (Woods, 2005). Additionally, it involves the use of agri-chemicals to enhance yields and the application of biotechnology

as a means to support “factory farm” methods of livestock rearing (Woods, 2011).

Evidence of these changes were previously present in the prairie regions of the United

Table 1: Structural Characteristics, Process Responses, and Consequences of Productivist Agriculture

Structural Characteristics	Primary Process Responses	Secondary Consequences
<i>Intensification</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchased inputs replace labour and substitute for land, increasing dependence on agro-inputs industries • Mechanization and automation of production processes • Application of developments in biotechnology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of supply cooperatives • Rising agricultural indebtedness • Increasing energy intensity and dependence on fossil fuels • Overproduction for the domestic market • Destruction of environment and agro-ecosystems
<i>Concentration</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fewer but larger farming units • Production of most crops and livestock concentrated on fewer farms, regions, and countries • Sale of farm produce to food processing industries – increasing dependence on contract farming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of marketing cooperatives • New social relations in rural communities • Inability of young to enter farming • Polarization of the farm size structure • Corporate ownership of land • Increasing inequalities in farm incomes between farm sizes, types, and locations • State agricultural policies favouring large firms and certain regions
<i>Specialization</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labour specialization, including the management function • Fewer farm products from each farm, region, and country 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food consumed outside region where it was produced • Increased risk of system failure • Changing composition of workforce • Structural rigidity in farm production

Source: Woods, 2011, p. 69.

States and Canada. For example, the size and price of tractors doubled and then quadrupled between the 1960s and 1970s in the “Great Plains” area of the United States (Manning, 1997 as cited in Woods, 2005). Canadian usage of nitrogen fertilizer in Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan also increased from 50.4 thousand tones in 1948 to 569.9 thousand tones in 1979 (Wilson, 1981 as cited in Woods, 2005).

Concentration is another key characteristic of productivism. Its central aim is to maximize cost effectiveness through the amalgamation of fields and farms into larger units (Woods, 2005; Woods, 2011). The rural landscapes of Canada demonstrate such changes as the total number of farms decreased by approximately 300,000 while the average farm size increased by about 250 acres from 1951 to 1981 (See Figure 1a and

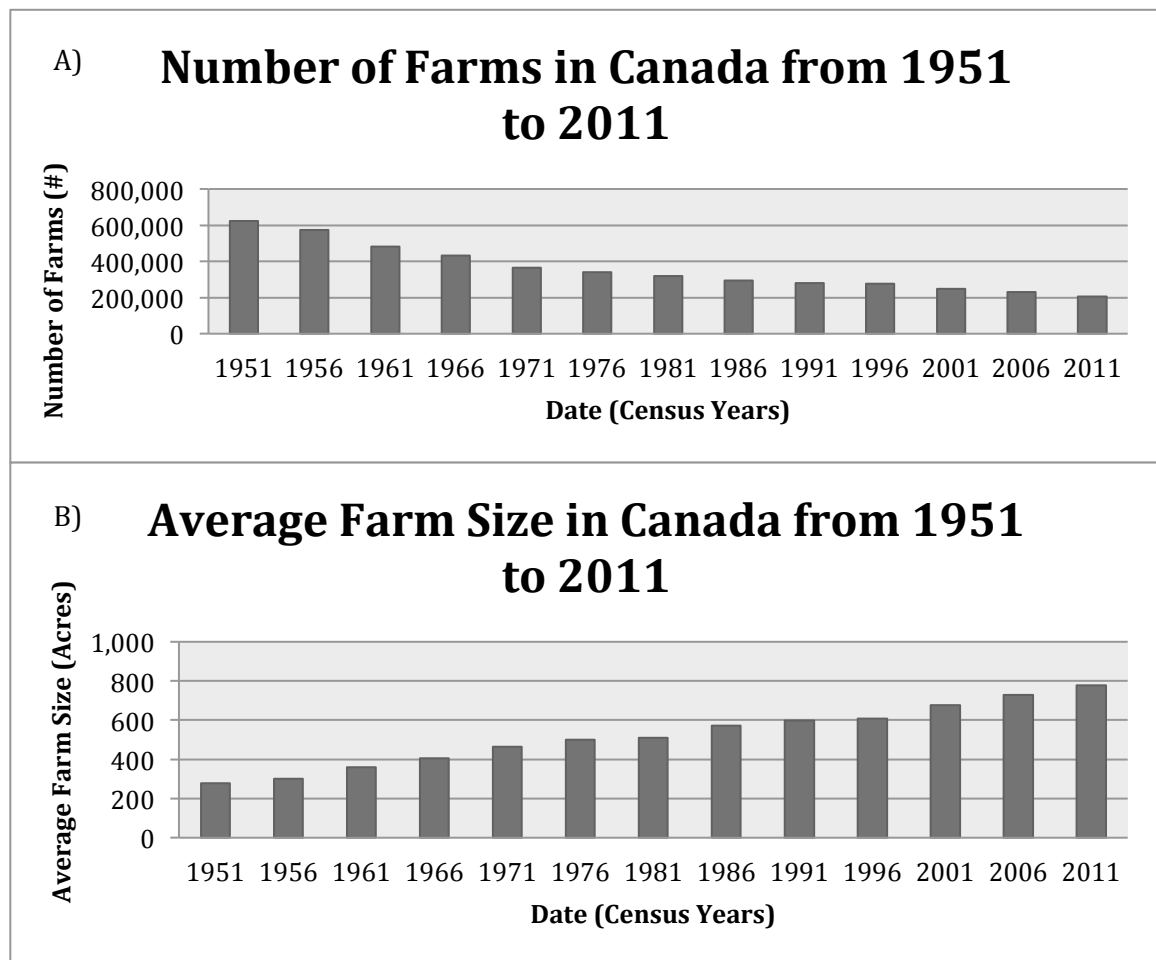


Figure 1: Productivist agriculture occurring in the form of concentration in Canadian farmscapes A) Number of farms in Canada from 1951 to 2011 is decreasing. B) Average farm size in Canada from 1951 to 2011 is increasing (Statistics Canada, 2011).

1b). These trends continue, if at a less dramatic rate, into the twenty-first century. What is significant is that the vast majority of these farms did not disappear; rather, they merged to form farms that were corporate-owned. Corporate farms were able to streamline the food commodity chain by way of contracts, either with a government-sponsored

marketing board, food processing company, or private retailer (Woods, 2005). Hence, they were more efficient at producing goods and getting them to the market than traditional farms because they could go through a single buyer (or supplier) instead of one or more intermediary. This made it difficult for traditional farms to compete with corporate farms. Gradually, the former were at risk for being squeezed out by the latter.

The last characteristic of productivism is specialization. Specialization favours the use of monocultures over diverse crop patterns in order to gain greater degrees of productive efficiency (Woods, 2005; Woods, 2011). This often results in individual farms and/or entire regions mass-producing a single product, such as dairy or fruit. Wales in the United Kingdom is a good example of specialization because its rural areas saw an 81% increase in the average area of cereal cultivation per farm between 1967 and 1981 (Ilbery, 1985 as cited in Woods, 2005). The poultry industry in Canada denotes a similar trend as the top 5% of poultry farms accounted for 75% of total gross farm receipts (GFR) by the late 1980s (Troughton, 1992 as cited in Woods, 2005). What is interesting is that the labourers who worked these farms (and farm labourers in general) were contracted by different employers to perform repeated tasks on-site (Woods, 2005). For instance, they were contracted by a number of farms as a combine harvester operator instead of as a generalist farm worker for a single farm. This means that patterns of labour were also subject to specialization, much like crops and regions.

There is considerable evidence supporting the idea that productivism dramatically restructured agriculture as well as the lives of people in rural communities since its onset in the 1940s. However, the evidence became much more apparent and somewhat “alarming” after the 1970s when the political shift towards neoliberalism replaced

egalitarian liberalization (i.e. Keynesian economics) in the United Kingdom and the United States (Knox et al., 2008; Woods, 2005; Woods, 2011). Knox et al (2008) defines neoliberalism as the resurgence of nineteenth century ideas associated with classical liberalism, which advocates for economic liberalization policies in order to “hollow out” the capacity of central governments and, more importantly, enhance the role of the private sector in the economy (Knox et al., 2008). Examples of economic liberalization policies include deregulation, privatization, free trade, fiscal austerity, and cutbacks in government spending (Knox et al., 2008). These policies operate beyond control of rural communities for they are international in terms of scale. As such, they are linked to a key term in geography called globalization², which has resulted a number of consequences for small family-owned farms and the wider social, economic, and environmental dynamics of rural communities (Refer back to Table 1). Many of these consequences were “unintended” and very unexpected (Kenner, 2009; Woods, 2011).

2.3. Post-Productivist Transition

The changes outlined transformed rural communities entirely and have thereby forced small family-owned farms to increase their resilience to external stresses by adopting a post-productivist lifestyle. The term post-productivism emerged in the UK in the 1980’s and became widely applied and accepted by scholars as a conceptual framework for explaining recent agricultural change (Wilson, 2009). According to Mather et al. (2006), post-productivism is frequently explained in terms of dimensions rather than definitions and is generally characterized by extensification; improved quality

² “Globalization is conceptualized not as the movement of goods, people, and capital around the world, but as the advanced interconnection and interdependence of [rural (and urban)] localities around the world, reflecting the compression of time and space” (Woods, 2005, p.32-33).

of food production; pluriactivity in the workforce; concern for the environment; dispersion of food production patterns; commoditization of the countryside; and a weakened role of the state in policy-making as well as a more inclusive model of governance (Evans et al., 2002; Wilson, 2009). These dimensions highlight the shift in rural landscapes from “places of production” to “places of consumption” (Wilson, 2009) as rural communities attempt to undermine or recover from intensification systems associated with maximizing food production (Wilson and Rigg, 2003). The lifestyle changes made by farmers throughout the post-productivist transition (PPT) are often labeled as a strategy to “survive” the productivist cost-price squeeze (Marsden and Sonnino, 2008).

The post-productivist transition seems to provide hope for rural communities; however, more contemporary studies in rural geography are skeptical of the concept and, in some cases, even deny its formal existence. Critics, for instance, have referred to post-productivism as a “theoretical cul de sac” (Mather et al., 2006), “academic myth” (Morris and Evans, 2002), “fuzzy” (Wilson, 2009), and a “false blind alley” (Evans et al., 2002), arguing that the prefix “post” implies complete abandonment of industrial modes of production in agriculture. The general consensus is that earlier scholars often dismissed the role of actor-oriented and behaviourally-grounded research in their studies and, therefore, failed to acknowledge empirical evidence that demonstrates post-productivist ideologies have ‘not’ yet occurred (Wilson, 2009). For example, the mandate of grassroots organizations, such as the Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association (WCWG), is to develop policy solutions that strengthen the profitability and sustainability of farming (WCWG, 2015). Ultimately, this example suggests that

productivist and post-productivist schools of thought co-exist spatially, temporally, and structurally rather than function as a separate entity (Wilson, 2009). It also indicates that all actors do not adopt the same post-productivist mindset at the same time or at the same scale (Wilson, 2009). Another critique that makes the PPT problematic stems from the fact that nearly all case studies are conceptualized from a Eurocentric perspective and rarely studied but applied to other settings in North America and Australasia (Wilson, 2009). Rural communities in these areas do not share the same behavioural patterns, values, and belief systems with those in Europe nor is their agricultural sector comparable. The same theoretical framework is therefore not necessarily applicable, and thus should be tested for appropriate fit rather than naively assuming all rural communities fit the same model. In lieu of these drawbacks, rural geographers today are more likely to utilize the term “multifunctional agriculture” (Wilson, 2001) in their research as it better fits the context of most agricultural communities and provides a more accurate depiction of the multiple and, sometimes, overlapping dimensions that contribute to agricultural change (Woods, 2011).

2.4. Multifunctional Agriculture

The notion of “multifunctional agriculture” (MFA) is arguably the most accurate concept to use when describing agricultural change in contemporary rural societies. By definition, MFA is seen as “a regime within, beside, or beyond productivism and post-productivism as it includes several functions of agriculture in addition to its primary role, which has mainly been understood as producing food and fibre” (Bikorkhaug and Richards, 2008, p.101). These additional functions include marketable products (for

example, tourism) as well as non-commodity outputs like food security/safety, a rural way of life, and protection of the environment (i.e., resources, biodiversity, and landscapes) (Durand and Huylenbroek, 2003, as cited in Bikorkhaug and Richards, 2008; Woods, 2011).

The concept of MFA has evolved since its initial appearance in the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in the 1990s (Cairol et al., 2009; Wilson, 2009). It is no longer viewed as a policy outcome; rather, it assumes a normative meaning that derives from its position in Wilson's (2007) "multifunctionality spectrum" (Figure 2). As shown, multifunctionality is anchored in between two theoretical extremes, productivism and nonproductivism, so as to highlight that almost any agricultural action and/or thought cannot be solely described as productivist or nonproductivist because it contains elements of both and does so simultaneously in a non-linear and heterogeneous way (Wilson, 2009). An example that demonstrates this and is easy to explain is that of

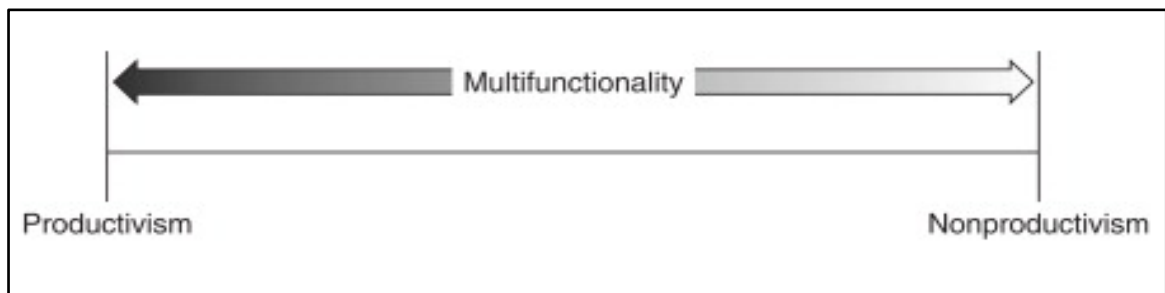


Figure 2: The multifunctionality spectrum (Wilson, 2007 as cited in Wilson, 2009).

an organic farm. An organic farm produces fruits and vegetables to make profit but does so without using agri-chemicals or high-tech machines so as to show consumers in the local community that the operators are environmentally-conscious and/or good stewards of the land. The organic farm is positioned closer to the non-productivist end of the multifunctionality spectrum (Figure 3). It never stopped producing food and fibre nor did

it transition in a linear or homogeneous fashion as it has the potential to move closer to the productivist end or vice versa and back again. This example demonstrates the advantages of using the multifunctionality spectrum as a conceptual framework for it explains that multiple and overlapping processes can occur in any farming system (i.e., traditional or non-traditional) and acknowledges the complexity of agricultural change (Wilson, 2009; Woods, 2011). Moreover, it also demonstrates that the framework can be applied to any location around the world since it is largely independent of the history of policy-making trajectories specific to a given territory (e.g., EU) (Wilson, 2009).

More recently, the multifunctionality spectrum has been re-theorized to characterize varying degrees of quality³ (Wilson, 2010). These include ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ multifunctional quality (Wilson, 2010), as well as ‘moderate’ multifunctional quality

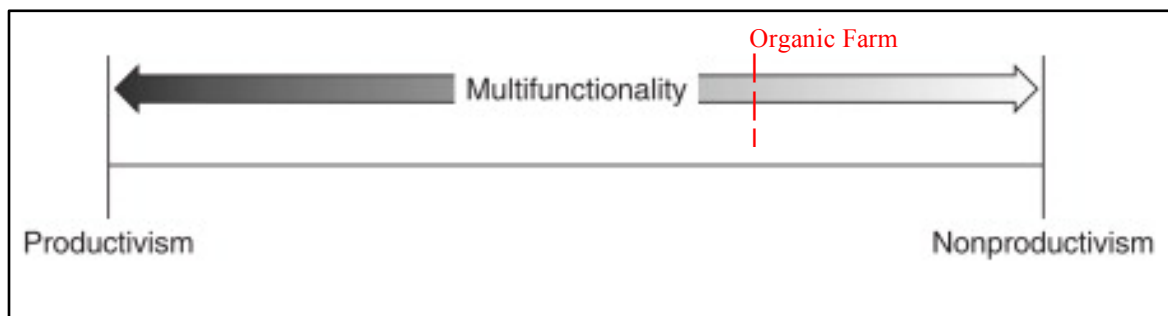


Figure 3: Position of an organic farm on Wilson's Multifunctionality Spectrum (Huellemann, 2015; Wilson, 2007).

(depending on the academic) (Wilson, 2009). Weak multifunctional quality is positioned towards the productivist end of the multifunctionality spectrum (refer back to Figure 2) and is often associated with negative attributes that increase the vulnerability of rural communities to external forces (Table 2). It is the worst type of multifunctionality for it rarely produces sustainable farming systems (Wilson, 2010).

³ The ontological meaning of quality refers to “a system of properties that make a thing or process what it is and which make it different from other things or processes” (Wilson, 2010, p. 365). Quality is, however, relational and, therefore, always subjective.

Table 2: Multifunctionality and Global Indicators (Selection) of Well- And Poorly-Developed Economic, Social, And Environmental Capital

Types of Capital	Strongly Developed Capital	Weakly Developed Capital
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic well-being • Diversified income streams (e.g. pluriactivity) • Low dependency on external funds (e.g. agricultural subsidies) • Multifunctional businesses • Integration into global capitalist system (?) • Happiness (?) • Etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty/debt • Over-dependency on agricultural production • Poor infrastructure • High dependency on external funding (e.g., subsidies, remittances from abroad) (?) • Communities as net importers of food • Etc.
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close interaction between rural people (tight knit communities) • Availability of skills training and education • Good health and sanitation • Multifunctional services • Good communication between stakeholder groups • Female empowerment/empowerment of ethnic minorities in rural areas (?) • Open-minded communities (ability to accept change) • Good and transparent land ownership regulations (control over means of production) • Rural stakeholders in control of development trajectories • Strong governance structures at multiple geographic scales (democratic participation) • Etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outmigration of young people (greying of rural communities) • Service deserts • Lack of leadership • Lack of control of destiny of rural community • High death rates and low life expectancy • Poor communication between stakeholder groups • Female dependency/gender-or ethnically-based lack of self-determination • Weak land ownership patterns (e.g. high levels of tenant/dependent farmers) • General dissatisfaction with rural community pathways • Weak governance • Etc.
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High levels of biodiversity • Good water quality and availability • Sustainable soil management • Predictable agricultural yields • Sustainable management of environmental resources in rural community • Multifunctional environmental resources • Etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soil degradation • Desertification • Poor water quality and availability • Uncertainty over agricultural yields • Etc.

Source: (Wilson, 2010, p.369).

Strong multifunctional quality, on the other hand, is situated closer to the nonproductivist

end of the multifunctionality spectrum (refer back to Figure 2). These farming systems encompass positive attributes that enhance the resiliency of rural communities (refer back to Table 2). For instance, they are diversified and rarely rely on external funds to stay afloat. They also offer a wide range of services to people, many of whom are tight-knit, and utilize best management practices to keep agricultural resources (e.g., air, water, soil, etc.) of good quality. In other words, farming systems of strong multifunctional quality are predicated on strong economic, social, and environmental capital and are more likely to result in the development of sustainable rural communities. The last type of multifunctional quality is moderate. A farming system of moderate multifunctional quality possesses attributes of both qualities previously described. Its location on the multifunctionality spectrum is closer to the middle but also has the potential to be either “left wing” (i.e. moderately-weak) or “right wing” (i.e. moderately-strong). The organic farm (refer back to Figure 3), for example, can be identified as a farming system of moderate to strong multifunctional quality. Most farming systems appear to be of moderate multifunctional quality; however, strong multifunctional quality is what every farming system should strive to achieve.

2.5. Agritourism

A subset of multifunctional agriculture that has gained considerable attention in recent years is agritourism. Most of the literature on agritourism is preoccupied with defining it as a strategy of rural economic development. Still, no standard definition for the term exists. For example, labels used interchangeably with agritourism include: farm tourism, farm-based tourism, and rural tourism (Phillip et al., 2010). These are not exactly synonymous with agritourism but are closely linked as they offer a similar

product and/or service for the agritourist (Ainley and Smale, 2010; Syznajder et al., 2009). Phillip et al. (2010) also designed a five-class theoretical typology of agritourism, which is based on characteristics like non-working farm agritourism; working farm, passive contact agritourism; working farm, indirect contact agritourism; working farm, direct staged agritourism; and working farm, direct authentic agritourism. Flanigan et al. (2014) revised this framework by removing non-working farm components. This thesis makes use of Barbieri's (2013) definition of agritourism for I feel it is all encompassing and best demonstrates how agritourism operates in North America. Agritourism is understood as "any recreational, educational, or leisure-based activity programmed on a working farm or other agricultural operation (e.g. plant nursery, mill) [that is meant] to attract visitors" (Barbieri, 2013, p. 253). Activities include, but are not limited to, farm tours, direct participation in farming activities (e.g. milking a cow, pick-your-own fruits and vegetables), nature contemplation, on-farm lodging and food services (e.g. cabins, bed and breakfasts, wine tasting, culinary), markets (e.g. farmer and supper), roadside stands, and special events (e.g. agricultural festivals, orchard weddings). These activities are said to have distinctive elements from other farm-operated enterprises, such as value-added processing offered to consumers (Barbieri, 2013). Barbieri (2013) also notes a difference in terms of the motivations for pursuing agritourism activities, which will be discussed below.

The motivations for pursuing agritourism operations on a working farm have been explored from the viewpoint of many stakeholders, such as farmers (Barbieri, 2013), family members of farmers (Ainley, 2014), landowners (Pegas et al., 2013), and consumers (Flanigan et al., 2014). Mainly, the motivations are tied to sustainable

development initiatives and can be organized into three interconnected categories: economic, socio-cultural, and environmental. Economic motivations consist of a meaningful source of employment; a supplementary source of income; an increase in sales tax revenues; relocalization; and a strategy to retain youth (Ainley, 2014; Barbieri, 2013; Flanigan et al., 2014). Socio-cultural motivations include an improved quality-of-life; a chance to re-establish connections with the farm; an opportunity to protect local heritage; and the potential to eliminate gender stereotypes on traditional family farms (Ainley, 2014). Last, environmental motivations are associated with the preservation of agricultural land and natural landscapes (Barbieri, 2013). Each of these motivations is perceived as a good reason to start-up an agritourism operation. However, the motivations and the benefits accrued are not universal; they are based on factors like the length of time in operation, the intensity of offerings, and the proximity to other attractions (Barbieri, 2013).

Agritourism has been studied in a vast number of countries, most of which are located in the developed world as opposed to the developing. For example, research has been conducted in European countries, such as Italy (Cox et al., 2011; Ohe and Ciani, 2012) and the United Kingdom (Phelan and Sharpley, 2011). The United States has also been a popular study area, particularly within the states of New Jersey (Schilling and Sullivan, 2014), Michigan (Che et al., 2005), Oregon (Pegas et al., 2013), Arkansas (Das and Rainey, 2010), and Missouri and North Carolina (Gil Arroyo et al., 2013). The Canadian context, on the other hand, has rarely been studied beyond the national scale. Exceptions include a study of the challenges for agritourism development in Nova Scotia by Colton and Bissex (2005) and a phenomenological study of agritourism

entrepreneurship in Ontario by Ainley (2014). No agritourism studies appear to have been conducted in Canada at a smaller scale (e.g., regional, municipal).

2.6. Recent Studies

As implied in the previous section, no academic literature exists that specifically examines agritourism as a rural economic development strategy in the Niagara Region; however, a small number of studies indirectly present related findings. For example, Gayler (2003) discusses the evolution of the agritourism industry in the Niagara Region as well as the pressures it places on land-use patterns at the rural-urban fringe. He associates agritourism, particularly the wine industry, with neoliberal discourses that construct agritourism development as a “responsible use of agricultural land resources” because they generate large economic spin-offs, such as new employment opportunities and an expanded tax base for the region (Gayler, 2003, p. 186). Despite their benefits, Gayler notes that Niagara’s agritourism projects are a major source of rural conflict due to a lack of proper planning around urbanization. He argues that agritourism threatens rural landscapes and livelihoods because it is a root cause of traffic, noise, and pollution as well as urban shadow effects in the Niagara Region (Gayler, 2003). He recommends that policies at all levels of government shift towards the promotion of a viable agritourism industry that respects the primacy of agricultural land. Essentially, Gayler’s work builds on existing research conducted by Krueger (1978) and Krueger (2000), which discusses urbanization as one of the many economic hazards for tender fruit growers in the Niagara Peninsula (and other areas in Canada with a similar geography) and identifies the policies government officials put in place to preserve prime agricultural

land. This indicates urbanization is a long-term problem in rural communities but also that preserving agricultural land has been a re-occurring solution since the 1980s.

In addition to Gayler's research, Eaton (2004) explores alternative food projects in Niagara through the use of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) – a theory that traces how society is organized into geographic assemblages and made stable in both time and space (Johannesson and Baerenholdt, 2009). Eaton's research demonstrates three key findings. First, Eaton argues that Niagara's agritourism industry is a network *in-the-making* because it is comprised of situated actors who have the ability to enroll or resist the enrolment of other actors and non-human objects into its network (Eaton, 2004). These situated actors (e.g., wineries, the Vintners Quality Alliance, and the Wine Council of Ontario) are powerful in that their interests and actions strongly influence Niagara's path to economic development. Many of them are also able to lobby for government support. Second, Eaton argues that the success of Niagara's agritourism network is solely dependent on neoliberal discourses that portray business-development-tourism (B-D-T) as a promising form of development. The dominance of B-D-T resonates throughout government policies and is mutually reinforced in practice. The discourse therefore creates a social construction of Niagara that portrays the region as stagnating, weak, and in need of B-D-T to survive or be considered 'healthy.' Finally, the third finding denotes a paradox that gives rise to acts of resistance by alternative food actors. These actors (e.g., farmers markets, community-supported agriculture (CSA), community gardens, and organic producers) have participated in the active disruption of the agritourism network through two mediums: indications of discontent with the way resources are distributed and outright attempts to decrease consolidation among actors. Eaton argues that these acts

of resistance indicate the agritourism network is vulnerable and/or not as strong as key actors may perceive it to be.

2.7. Conclusion

Most of the literature on this topic is practical rather than theoretical. This is because the literature attempts to explore agritourism as a concept and, more recently, discover the motivations for pursuing this type of operation on a working farm or determine how it can be used as a strategy of rural economic development. The scale of research projects is large for they have primarily been conducted at the national and sub-national scale. Hence, there is a gap in the literature that explores agritourism at a smaller scale. The goal of this study is to partially fill this research gap by exploring agritourism at the regional scale in the Regional Municipality of Niagara, Ontario. I plan to determine if agritourism is a viable economic development strategy for the Niagara Region to pursue through the use of two research questions:

- What is the current status of the agritourism industry in the Niagara Region?
- What lessons can be learned from this research that might enhance the future development of the agritourism industry in the Niagara Region?

There is a need for such research as the Niagara Region is undergoing changes in its agricultural sector much like those outlined above. These changes are affecting rural parts of Niagara as small family farms are disappearing completely or slowly being integrated into larger farms. Agritourism is the strategy most policy makers have chosen to help small family farms survive; however, it is not really being monitored. No statistics exist (at least that are publicly available) and the opportunities and constraints for agritourism development are largely unknown to planners and economic developers or, at least,

poorly understood. This is a problem for rural Niagara, especially if it wants to (re) brand itself as a sustainable agritourism destination in the future. The next chapter of this thesis presents information on the study area and the methodology employed.

CHAPTER 3:

STUDY AREA AND METHODOLOGY

The focus of this research revolves around the recent need to recognize that agritourism has the potential to be used as a rural economic development strategy in the Niagara Region and as one means to counteract the changes brought forth by agricultural restructuring and other exogenous forces (e.g. globalization) in a practical way. In order to demonstrate this, a number of stakeholders were invited to participate in a face-to-face interview. The three stakeholder groups were government officials (e.g., planners and economic developers), agritourism operators, and representatives from local organizations. The vast majority of stakeholders who participated in this study worked in different municipalities. Agritourism operators and representatives from local organizations also engaged in different types of agritourism activities. The rationale behind the inclusion of three stakeholder groups was rooted in the idea that more stakeholders would add breadth to the study by providing opinions that capture different aspects of the agritourism industry. The sectoral diversity of stakeholder groups was also expected to add depth to the study through the participants' discussion of their experiences, feelings, and beliefs.

The following section of this chapter adds context to my research study by providing a detailed overview of the study area. The content discussed includes: population characteristics; geographical context; economic sectors; and regulatory frameworks. In the subsequent section, I unpack my methodology by outlining ontological and epistemological justifications for using key informant interviews to collect data. The limitations of such are also noted. The chapter concludes with a

summary of the information presented.

3.1 Study Area

The Niagara Region is located in Southern Ontario and is comprised of twelve local municipalities (Figure 4). Geographically speaking, the Region's spatial extent covers approximately 1,852 square kilometres, most of which is comprised of rural land.

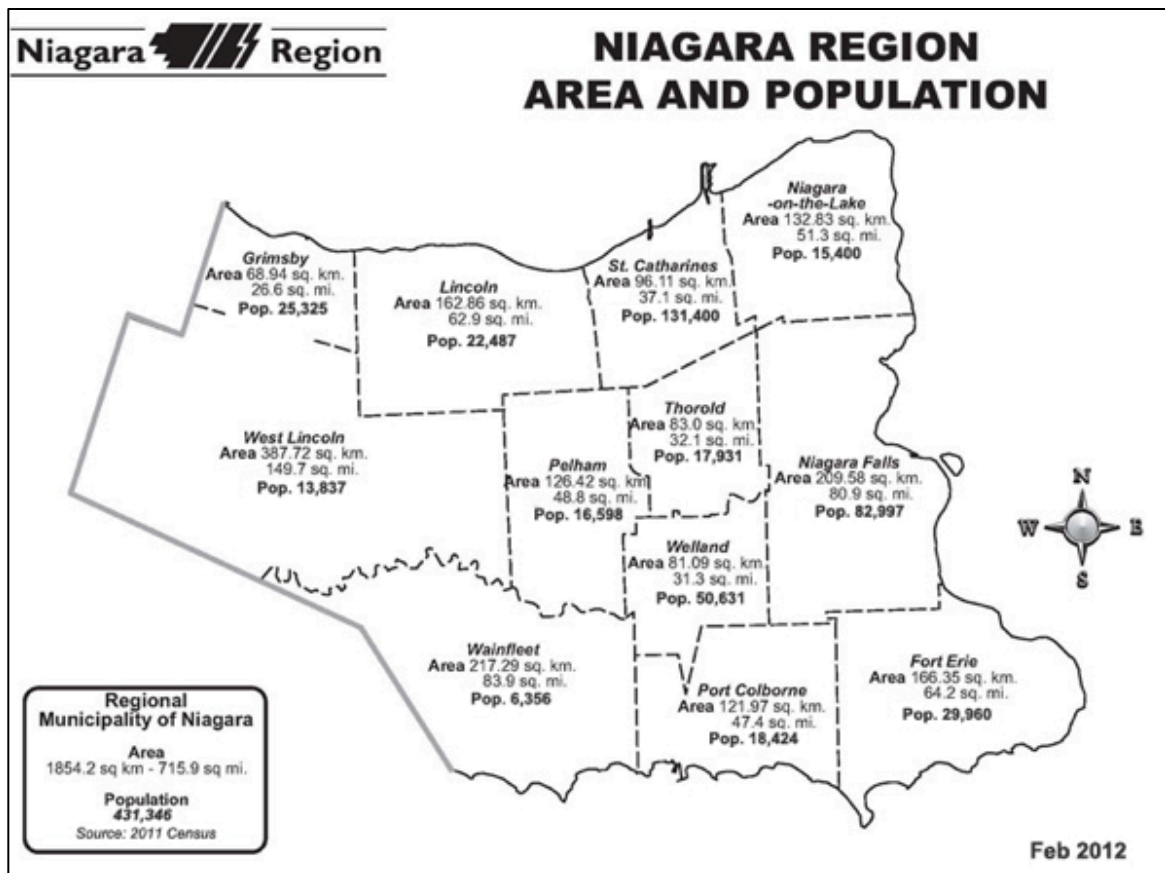


Figure 4: Location of twelve municipalities within the Niagara Region as well as their respective land area and population (Niagara Region, 2014)

The bulk of Niagara's population, however, resides in three of its urban municipalities:

St. Catharines, Welland, and Niagara Falls (Niagara Region, 2014b). In 2011, the Region had 431,346 residents and a median age of 44.1 years old (Niagara Region, 2014b; Niagara Region, 2014d). The largest age cohort is forty-five to forty-nine years old with

84.5 percent of the population fifteen years or older (Niagara Economic Development Corporation, 2010). Other statistics related to Niagara's population denote an unemployment rate of 6.2 percent and an average income of \$74,367 per household (Niagara Economic Development Corporation, 2010; Niagara Region, 2014a). Recently, the Niagara Region has also welcomed a large amount of newcomers, with 20 percent of the population able to speak a language other than English (Niagara Economic Development Corporation, 2010).

Niagara's physical attributes are diverse and thereby allow for the development of a climate that is unique in comparison to other areas of Southern Ontario. According to Shaw (2013), the Region can be divided into three broad physiographic areas: the Lake Iroquois Plain; the Niagara Escarpment; and the Haldimand Clay Plain. These features influence the Region's climate through their gentle and steep slopes, which act as a shelterbelt for low-lying areas and allow for greater days of sunshine (Shaw, 2013). Because Niagara is also bounded by two of the Great Lakes – Ontario to the north and Erie to the south – as well as the Niagara River, the climate is further moderated as the surface area of these water bodies have a slow response to winter air temperatures and act as a heat reservoir for municipalities in close proximity to their shores (Shaw, 2013). The combined effect of these features transforms Niagara's regional climate from mid-latitude continental to semi-maritime (Shaw, 2013). This allows growing season conditions for specialty crops to flourish as the number of frost-free days (i.e., days above -2° Celsius) range from 166 days in the municipality of Welland to 182 days in Port Colborne (Shaw, 2013). The number of heat units (i.e., days above 10° Celsius) averaged over a thirty-one year period (1971-2002) range from 1,350 days in Welland to 1,392 days in Vineland

(Shaw, 2013). Over a seven-month growing season, these two measures allowed for 1,366 to 1,588 growing degree days (GDD) in Niagara for the period between 1995 and 2004 (Shaw, 2013).

Soil characteristics are a second phenomenon that is unique and important to the Niagara Region. The Gleyed Luvisol classification type dominates the soil in the Niagara Region as the ground surface is mainly composed of light textured Luvisols followed by heavy-textured clay soils called Gleysols (Dagesse, 2013). These soils are considered to be less-agriculturally desirable because the downward flow of water risks water logging, which may become excessive (Dagesse, 2013). However, farmers within the Niagara Region have practiced good strategies of soil management via tile drainage (Dagesse, 2013). This has resulted in the creation of one of the best soils for crop growth as it promotes easy workability, acceptable water infiltration rates, good root penetration, and high-water holding capacities that promote water deficit stress (Dagesse, 2013). Niagara's clay-rich soils are therefore able to compete with coarser-textured soils comprised of sand because filtration through pore spaces is able to hold water in a manner that prevents crops from extracting sufficient quantities even though the water content may be quite high (Dagesse, 2013).

The amalgamation of a unique climate and good quality soil has worked to benefit the economic base of the Niagara Region. A long-established component of Niagara's economy is tied to the agricultural production of tender fruits (namely grapes, cherries, plums, peaches, and apricots); however, Niagara's agricultural production profile also includes hog, dairy, cattle, poultry & egg, miscellaneous specialty, vegetable, and livestock combination commodities (Niagara Region 2014c). According to the 2011

census, these products generated over \$725 million in Gross Farm Receipts⁴ (GFR) and accounted for approximately 42 percent of the total dollars accumulated in the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) (Table 3) despite a 10 percent drop in the number of farms and the decline of 8,817 farm acres since 2006. The vast majority of GFR's are derived from three municipalities: Lincoln, Niagara-on-the-Lake, and West Lincoln (Table 4). This corresponds with the commodities deemed most important in the Niagara Region, as GFR's for poultry & egg, fruit, and cash crops rank the highest and are the most

Table 3: Total amount of farms (#), land dedicated to farmland (Acres) and total gross farm receipts (\$) for the Niagara Region in comparison to that of the Greater Golden Horseshoe

Geographic Location	Number of Farms							Change in Number of Farms		Percent Change	
	1981	1986	1991	1996	2001	2006	2011	2001 to 2006	2006 to 2011	2001 to 2006	2006 to 2011
Ontario	82,448	72,713	68,633	67,520	59,728	57,211	51,950	-2,517	-5,261	-4%	-9%
Halton Region	969	834	744	720	619	566	469	-53	-97	-9%	-17%
Peel Region	942	824	711	689	522	483	440	-39	-43	-7%	-9%
York Region	1,741	1,361	1,185	1,211	1,020	972	828	-48	-144	-5%	-15%
Durham Region	2,495	2,218	2,090	2,001	1,709	1,686	1,454	-23	-232	-1%	-14%
Hamilton	1,553	1,393	1,225	1,228	1,026	975	885	-51	-90	-5%	-9%
Niagara Region	3,512	3,147	2,706	2,269	2,266	2,236	2,014	-30	-222	-1%	-10%
Golden Horseshoe	11,212	9,777	8,661	8,118	7,162	6,918	6,090	-244	-828	-3%	-12%

Source: Niagara Region, 2014c

prevalent industries in the most prosperous municipalities (Table 5). What is significant to mention is the net decline in GFR's for the greenhouse industry by almost \$5 million from 2006 to 2011 (Table 5). In the past, greenhouses were recognized as an economic driver for the Region because of their ability to extend both the peak and shoulder season for growing crops. However, the high value of the Canadian dollar and emergent

⁴ The census definition of gross farm receipts (before deducting expenses include receipts from all agricultural products sold and program payments and custom work receipts (Statistics Canada, 2014).

Table 4: Total gross farm receipts (\$) for each municipality in the Niagara Region from 2006 to 2011.

Geographic Location	Gross Farm Receipts	Gross Farm Receipts	Change (\$)	Percentage Change
	2006	2011		
Niagara Region	\$671,680,773	\$725,831,453	\$54,150,680	8%
Fort Erie	\$6,269,717	\$6,996,475	\$727,758	12%
Port Colborne	\$7,704,231	\$10,069,240	\$2,365,009	31%
Wainfleet	\$37,979,430	\$42,985,613	\$5,006,183	13%
West Lincoln	\$112,271,660	\$140,871,566	\$28,599,906	25%
Pelham	\$39,731,764	\$44,517,010	\$4,785,246	12%
Welland/Thorold	\$15,924,514	\$9,778,601	-\$6,145,913	-39%
Niagara Falls	\$9,800,302	\$13,390,575	\$3,590,273	37%
Niagara-on-the-Lake	\$143,297,060	\$157,280,430	\$13,983,370	10%
St. Catharines	\$73,596,789	\$82,427,329	\$8,830,540	12%
Lincoln	\$195,105,545	\$190,859,305	-\$4,246,240	-2%
Grimsby	\$29,999,761	\$26,655,309	-\$3,344,452	-11%

Source: Niagara Region, 2014c

¹Statistics related to Welland are combined with Thorold for the 2011 census only.

Table 5: Total GFR's for Niagara Region, including the breakdown of miscellaneous specialty, showing increase/decrease (\$) and percent change from 2006 to 2011

Commodity	Gross Farm Receipts (\$) 2006	Gross Farm Receipts (\$) 2011	Change (\$)	Percentage Change
Greenhouse Product	\$289,099,652	\$284,163,655	-\$4,935,997	-2%
Fruit	\$116,594,220	\$132,458,802	\$15,864,582	14%
Poultry & Egg	\$98,308,509	\$126,439,708	\$28,131,199	29%
Nursery Product & Sod & Maple	\$49,642,247	\$54,266,942	\$4,624,695	9%
Cash Crops	\$35,881,011	\$54,710,990	\$18,829,979	52%
Other Combination	\$28,044,916	\$2,831,432	-\$25,213,484	-90%
Dairy	\$18,218,970	\$17,176,952	-\$1,042,018	-6%
Hog	\$10,760,297	\$6,795,738	-\$3,964,559	-37%
Horse & Pony	\$7,849,642	\$5,657,465	-\$2,192,177	-28%
Cattle	\$5,241,407	\$1,690,156	-\$3,551,251	-68%
Vegetable	\$4,071,928	\$5,162,702	\$1,090,774	27%
Fur	\$2,912,524	x	x	x
Livestock Combination	\$2,481,080	\$6,182,473	\$3,701,393	149%
Other Livestock Specialty	\$1,591,807	\$151,478	-\$1,440,329	-90%
Goat	\$44,591	\$299,073	-\$141,518	-32%
Sheep	x	\$302,404	x	x
Mushroom	x	\$0	x	x
TOTAL	\$671,680,773	\$725,831,453	\$54,150,680	

Source: Niagara Region, 2014c

¹ Grape production is included under the "Fruit" category.

² Wheat, Grains & Oil seeds and Field Crops are included in the "Cash Crop" category.

³ X — Data is suppressed by Statistics Canada to meet confidentiality. Due to changes in data collection between 2006 and 2011 there has been a number of suppressions. With the suppression of data some categories will be significantly undervalued and not comparable or may not add up to the Total GFR's for 2006 or 2011.

competition in the horticultural sector across the Canada-US border has placed havoc on the industry's success, resulting in a myriad of smaller greenhouse operations being squeezed out of existence. Despite this drawback, Niagara's agricultural sector remains a significant economic force as its total economic impact generated approximately \$2.7 billion for the Region in 2011 and created over 17,227 direct jobs for its citizens (Niagara Region, 2014c).

In addition to agriculture, the Niagara economy also relies heavily on secondary industries based in manufacturing. The manufacturing sector attracted a large amount of newcomers in the early to mid-twentieth century because Niagara's physical geography offers ease of accessibility to hydroelectric power from the Niagara River, shipping access via the Welland Canal, and a business location close to the Canada-US border (Fullerton, 2013). These factors act as a pull factor for large-scale firms that specialized in steel products, automotive components, food and beverage, and paper goods (Fullerton, 2013). Although the vast majority of these firms generated a considerable amount of profit over the years, the Niagara Workplace Planning Board (NWPB) documents a net decline in manufacturing revenue from \$8.5 billion in 2003 to just over \$7 billion in 2008 as well as a loss of 13,500 manufacturing jobs from 1999 to 2009 (NWPB, 2010). The industries that suffered the greatest loss in revenue were those based in food (Figure 5). In particular, the closure of two food-processing facilities – Cadbury Schweppes and CanGro Foods – has proven harmful for the Region, especially where specialty cropland is located, since their disappearance has triggered spin-off effects for Niagara's agricultural sector. For example, Fullerton (2013) explains that no local buyer remained for tender fruit farmers after these plants closed in 2007 and 2008,

leaving over 230 fruit farmers with no means to sell their produce. Fullerton (2013) also notes that tender fruit farmers had spent thousands of dollars on upgrades to meet CanGro standards for Del Monte fruit products, most of which was wasted after the cannery relocated to China (Fullerton, 2013). Losses as substantial as these shifted the labour market profile of the Region as a number of manufacturing firms and small family-owned farms faltered. Other affected individuals have found careers in the tertiary

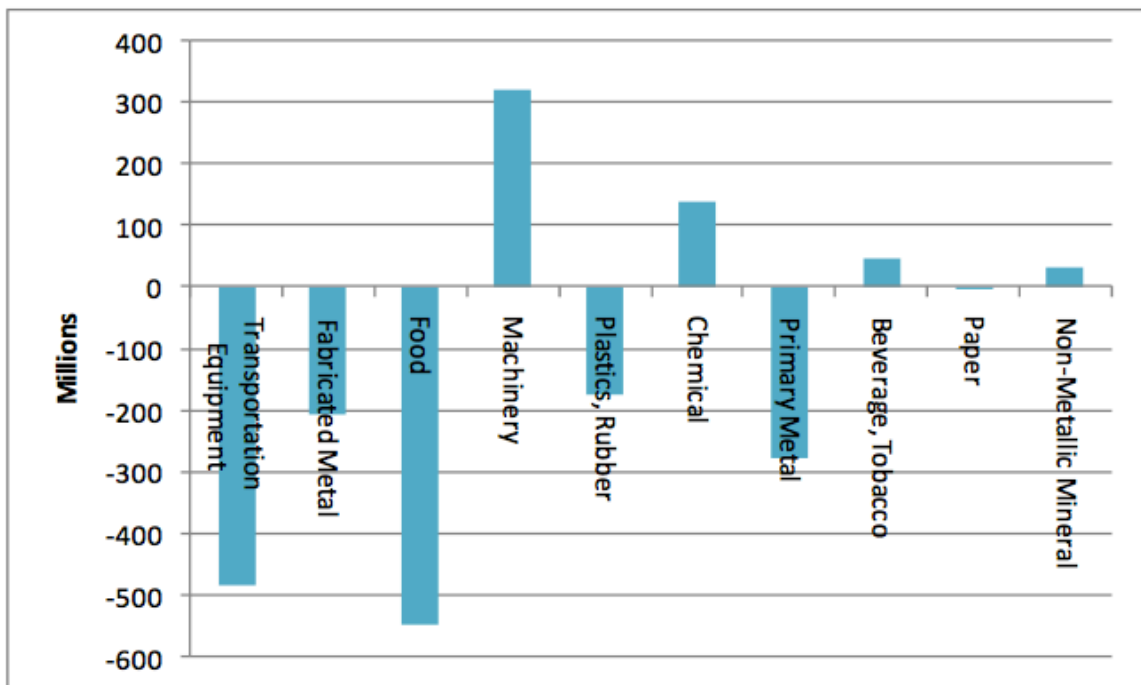


Figure 5: Net change in revenue by industry from 2003 to 2008 for the Niagara Region (NWPB, 2010).

sector, such as tourism and retail, for example, or searched for alternative modes of off-farm employment as a means to survive.

A third component that completes the triad of economic activities in the Niagara Region is the tourism & service sector. According to the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Sport (OMTCS) (2012), the Niagara Region is the largest bi-national tourist hub in the Province of Ontario; it attracted over ten million tourists in 2010, 31% of

whom were U.S. citizens. The most famous and/or well-known tourist attractions in the Region are the Horseshoe and American Falls and other attractions centered in the Clifton Hill and Fallsview districts of Niagara Falls. These attractions reflect an older model of tourism, made up largely of theme-park style attractions, such as haunted houses, wax museums, water parks, casinos, thrill rides, and fast-food strips (Eaton, 2004; Fullerton, 2013). The average visitor spends approximately \$154 per trip, totaling at \$1.6 billion in 2010 (OMTCS, 2012). In the same year, tourism employment amounted to over 21,087 jobs and accounted for 9.9% of the Region's total employment (OMTCS, 2012).

Although these statistics indicate that tourism-based development efforts have been positive for Niagara's economy, it is important to note that these jobs are highly seasonal, rarely offer full-time employment, and have a reputation for being low-wage and/or low-skilled in nature. Research and development in the area also predicts that the number of visitors from the United States is expected to decline due to fluctuating exchange rates, fuel costs, and fears associated with terrorism or health epidemics, such as SARS (OMTCS, 2008). Furthermore, the OMTCS (2012) indicates that the average number of nights spent by tourists in the Region (2.1) is considerably less than the provincial average of 3.1 nights per trip. This suggests that the vast majority of visits to Niagara are same-day visits and that the Region experiences difficulty extending its visitors' length-of-stay.

In order to counteract these drawbacks, the Niagara Region has attempted to integrate older models of tourism with more contemporary models that involve the harnessing of local assets such as heritage, arts and culture, as well as the natural landscape. Agritourism, in particular, has sparked interest in policy makers and has even

been labeled the “made in Niagara” strategy (Eaton, 2004) because of its territorial-based approach to economic development and ability to trap tourist dollars by satisfying the aesthetic, semiotic, and sensual needs of the visitor *in situ* (Scott, 2004 as cited in Scott, 2010). For example, farmers markets in the Niagara Region are combining the sale of produce with a music concert that features a local artist. Wineries have expanded their tours beyond that of touching grapes and tasting wine by providing an opportunity to bicycle through the countryside and “take in” Niagara’s bucolic landscape. Some “U-pick” operations have also found their niche through the creation of the Niagara Fruit Tree Trail — an agricultural tourist route that features heritage trees and perennial food crops that visitors can snack on or utilize to become closer to nature (Greening Niagara, 2014). Agritourism activities like these are being introduced to Niagara’s landscape in a rapid manner and are increasingly being marketed as a ‘high-end’ authentic experience by professionals (Eaton, 2004). Consequentially, this has resulted in agritourism activities being frequented by more elite travelers but also members of the creative class, the Francophone community, families with small children, and visitors from overseas (Eaton, 2004). This ability to attract new faces has extended the Region’s average visitors’ length-of-stay as more and more people escape to Niagara for a four-day weekend and/or take an extended holiday in the shoulder season. In 2006 alone, agritourism activities and its value-added component contributed to an economic gain of \$814 million for the Region (Regional Analytics Inc., 2010). This number is expected to grow as development within the agritourism industry unfolds and food movements, such as “Slow Food” and “Eat Local,” raise awareness about the industrial food system, fight to restore gastronomic pleasure, and, ultimately, try to reconnect people to the family farm.

The agritourism component of the tourism sector is not unique to other sectors of Niagara's economy in that it similarly requires a set of regulatory frameworks to govern how the industry operates. The regulatory frameworks that play an active role in shaping the agritourism industry in the Niagara Region include the *Niagara Escarpment Plan* (NEP), the *Provincial Policy Statement* (PPS), the *Greenbelt Plan*, and the *Regional Official Plan* (ROP). The *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* plays a minor role in that it attempts to curb sprawl and protect farmland by focusing on infill and other forms of development in urban centres instead of rural areas (Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2013). Each of these frameworks will be discussed below, except the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe*.

The NEP is Canada's first large-scale environmental land-use plan (NEC, 2005). It balances protection, conservation, and sustainable development to ensure that the Escarpment – a World Biosphere Reserve designated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) – will remain substantially as a natural environment for future generations (NEC, 2005). The NEP includes a set of policies and development criteria that pertain to various sites (e.g. Cave Springs, Balls Falls Conservation Area, Thirty Mile Creek, etc.) in the Niagara Peninsula (NEC, 2005). Policies of interest to this study are those that apply to the "Escarpment Rural Area" in the Niagara Peninsula as these areas provide a buffer to more ecologically sensitive parts of the Escarpment (NEC, 2005). The policies in this area permit minor forms of development, such as agricultural operations, small-scale commercial uses accessory to agriculture (e.g., B&B, farm vacation homes, and winery and winery incidental uses), and other uses; however, these are accompanied by strict development criteria to ensure the

Escarpment is not subject to negative impact (NEC, 2005). The policies and development criteria outlined may or may not support agritourism development in the Niagara Region at the present time.

The PPS is a planning document that has a lesser precedence than the NEP. Its policies apply to the Province of Ontario and provide a clear policy direction on land-use planning to promote strong communities, a strong economy, and a clean and healthy environment (Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2014). It is subject to amendment once every five years and, in its most recent amendment, the PPS permitted more *on-farm diversified uses* to better serve the broader farming community (Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2014). The PPS also added “on-farm diversified uses” to its list of definitions to clarify the meaning of this term (Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2014). The definition cites agritourism as the primary example of an on-farm diversified use, which indicates it is recognized as an economic driver for the Province of Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2014). These amendments are positive for Niagara’s agritourism industry because they demonstrate that government officials at the provincial level support its development and encourage new types of agritourism operations as long as they are consistent with policies set out in the plan.

The *Greenbelt Plan* came into effect on December 16, 2004 (Figure 6). The *Greenbelt Plan* protects over 1.8 million acres of agricultural and environmentally sensitive land in the GGH from urban development and urban sprawl by identifying a set of locations where urbanization should (and should not) occur (Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2005). It is inclusive of extensive lands within the

Niagara Region, including those designated as “protected countryside”⁵, “tender fruit and grape lands,” and lands within the NEP area (Figure 7). Each of these designations has

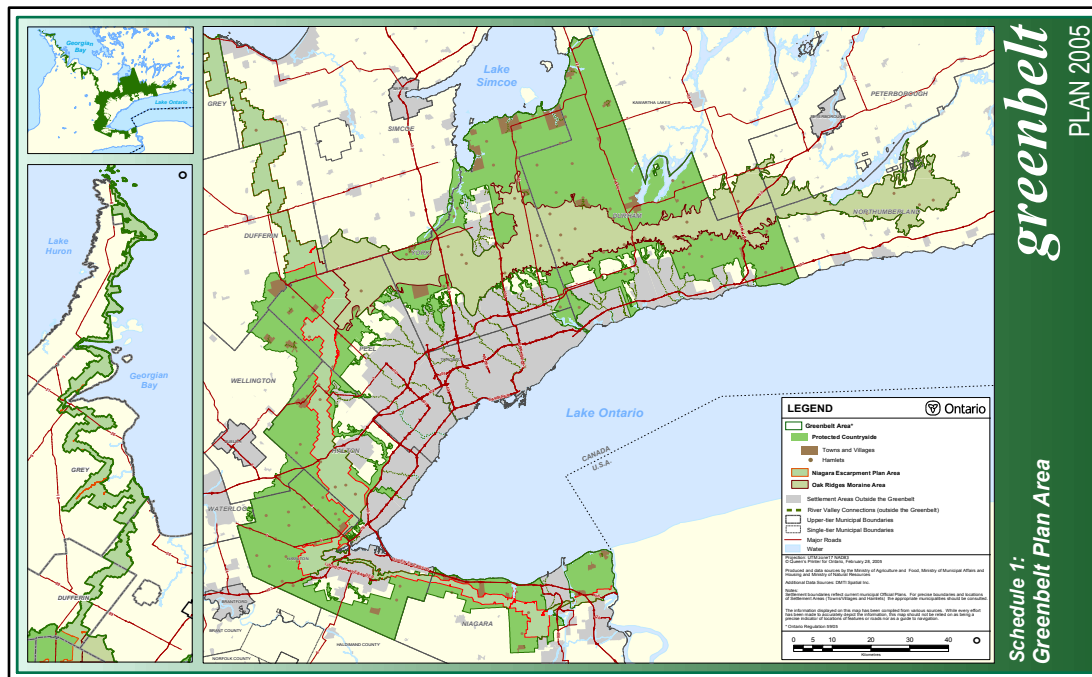


Figure 6: Location of Greenbelt in Southern Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2005).

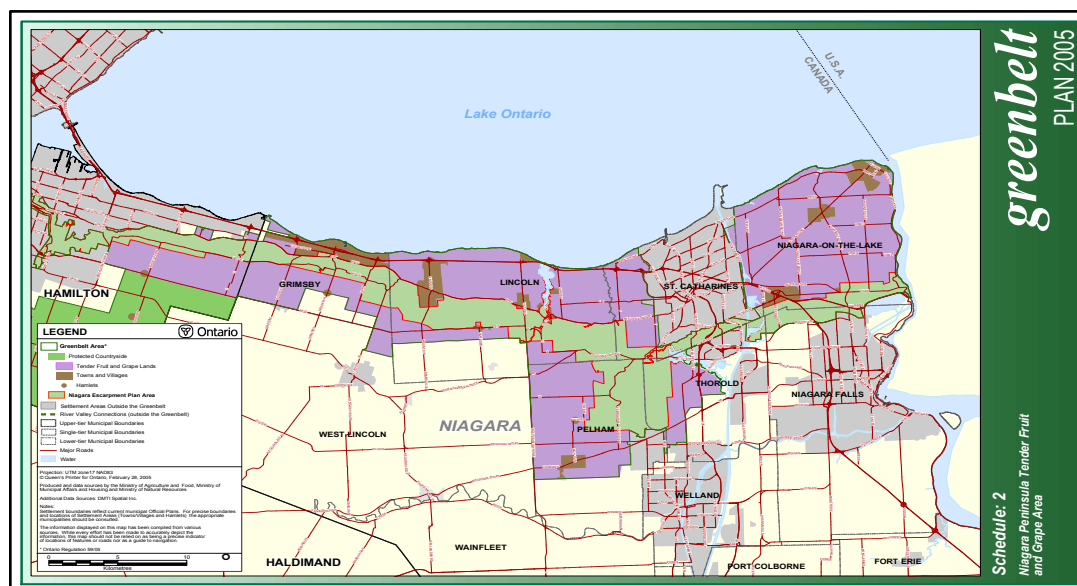


Figure 7: Greenbelt Plan land designations in the Niagara Region (Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2005).

⁵ The protected countryside contains an agricultural system that is made up of *specialty crop areas*, *prime agricultural areas*, and *rural areas* (Ontario Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2005).

their own policies for agritourism operators (and others in the agricultural industry) to follow. The policies are strict and make it difficult to develop in the Greenbelt, especially when it comes to infrastructure (i.e. general infrastructure and sewage, water, and storm management infrastructure) in the protected countryside (Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2005). There are mixed emotions about these policies (and others) circulating throughout the media. For example, the *Niagara Advance* reported numerous residents in the Niagara Region registered complaints about the *Greenbelt Plan* and also partook in a public meeting so they could voice their opinion about Greenbelt issues and/or opportunities (Mangelson, 2013). Currently, the Regional Municipality of Niagara is undertaking a review of the *Greenbelt Plan* and the impact of its implementation on the Niagara Region (Mangelson, 2013).

Finally, the ROP is a long-range planning document for the Regional Municipality of Niagara. The ROP “contains objectives, policies, and mapping that implement the Region’s approach to managing growth, growing the economy, protecting the natural environment [(including resources and agricultural land)], and providing infrastructure” (Niagara Region, 2015, p.1). It is subject to amendment from time to time and must conform with policies in the PPS and the *Greenbelt Plan* since they have greater precedence (Niagara Region, 2015). The most recent amendment to the ROP added farm diversification and value-added objectives to the Rural and Agriculture section of the plan (Niagara Region, 2015, Objective 5.A.8 to Objective 5.A.11). These objectives are accompanied by a set of policies that attempt to improve economic conditions for the farmer, some of whom may be agritourism operators. For example, Policy 5.B.3 states:

“[The Region] will support for a wide range of *farm diversification* uses in appropriate locations and at a scale suitable to the farm and the *agricultural area* where they contribute to economically sustainable agriculture” (Niagara Region, 2015, p.5-5).

Objectives and policies like these encourage farmers in the agricultural industry (and the agritourism industry) to find new ways to make profit, most of which were previously disallowed or absent in older versions of the ROP.

3.2 Methodology

One of the most compelling additions to twentieth century human geography is the use of qualitative research methods. Qualitative research is beneficial for those seeking to capitalize upon the use human environments and human experiences as a means to make sense of how individuals behave, interact, or encounter everyday life either singularly or within a given structure be it political, social, economic, cultural, or environmental (Winchester, 2005). The ways in which individuals experience life (i.e. places and events) differs drastically depending on their personal beliefs and feelings about the world and, ultimately, affects the way in which they come to know and/or understand the world (Winchester, 2005). Many geographers are interested in such phenomena as their contributions shed light on different viewpoints that might otherwise be silenced or excluded from data generated through the use of quantitative methods, such as surveys. I share this view and chose to use qualitative research methods, such as key informant interviews, to address my research questions. This permitted me, as a researcher, to understand more broadly the various perceptions of how agritourism operates within the Niagara Region, as I was able to gather and interpret data from a wide range of stakeholders.

The research design of my thesis is rooted in a non-experimental study procedure that involves a case study. According to Bradshaw and Stratford (2005), a case is an example of a general process and/or structure that can be theorized. The case of interest, the Niagara Region, occurs at a regional scale and is driven by a general interest in agritourism as a strategy of rural economic development. Studying a case at this level or scale is considered both practical and appropriate as I have direct access to the site and can gain access to information as long as ethical procedures are performed and maintained throughout the study. In addition, choosing a case at the provincial scale is too large to complete within the allotted time frame normally available to complete a Master's thesis, as Ontario's land-base is immense in terms of its size and diversity. Furthermore, qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews, require a considerable amount of time to set up, complete, transcribe, and analyze. Likewise, research conducted at the local scale would be regarded as 'insufficient' because agritourism networks span across municipal boundaries and are tied to a larger economic system.

3.2.1 Key Informant Interviews

The data collection tool employed for this study was the key informant interview. According to Dunn (2005), a key informant interview can be described as a face-to-face verbal exchange of information in which the researcher tries to gather expressions of opinion, value, or belief from an individual who has knowledge and understanding of what is 'happening' in a particular community and/or can provide insight into various problems as well as give recommendations for future solutions. The use of key informant interviews was considered most appropriate for this study because the stakeholders

involved within and across agritourism networks have been recognized only recently as an economic driver for the region by policy makers and, to a lesser extent, the general public. Key informant interviews provide a means to capture an individual's life experience with agritourism thus far as well as an opportunity to investigate the complex behaviours and motivations for pursuing agritourism in the Niagara Region. This empowers and shows respect – an element that is currently lacking – for agritourism operators and rural development planners as the interview takes seriously the participant's contributions to the research process. Key informant interviews also fill a gap in knowledge that other methods are unable to bridge efficaciously because they add depth to the study by allowing the participant to reflect upon his or her experience in their own words and to find out more about the research project than if they were being observed from afar or completing a simple “yes or no” questionnaire (Dunn, 2005).

3.2.2 Sampling Process

The sampling process of my research study commenced on April 22, 2014 and continued to progress for approximately eight weeks, ending on June 17, 2014. The sampling framework used to gather information was stakeholder sampling: a non-probability sampling technique that recruits participants who are major stakeholders involved in designing, giving, receiving, or administering the program and/or service being evaluated, and who might otherwise be affected by its practice (Given, 2008). The participants originally considered as ‘stakeholders’ for this study – agritourism operators and government officials, such as planners and economic developers – were recruited via email, where a letter of invitation was sent to their place of work. The email addresses

used to recruit such participants were obtained through the use of municipal websites and by conducting a general search for ‘agritourism operators in the Niagara Region’ via search engines such as Google. Fifty letters of invitation (Appendix 1) were emailed to major stakeholders in the Niagara Region as a means to obtain key informant interviews from each municipality and from each subset of agritourism activity (i.e., wineries, pick-your-own fruit and vegetable farms, farmers markets, orchard weddings, petting zoos, educational tour companies for on-site food production, etc.). Approximately one week after emailing the letters, an attempt was made to contact the stakeholders by telephone to arrange a formal face-to-face interview. Of these fifty invitations, eleven agritourism operators, six planners, and two economic developers responded by saying they would be interested in participating in an interview. Although the response rate was generally considered ‘high’ for a Master’s thesis research project, it was recognized during the interview process that local organizations and other governing bodies also influence agritourism policy and its operations in practice. Thus, two additional interviews were conducted with representatives from local organizations, as was another with an official from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA). These informants were recruited through the use of snowball sampling. In the end, the total number of interview participants for this research study amounted to twenty-two key informants, eleven of whom were male and eleven of whom were female.

3.2.3 Data Collection

The primary objective of the interview process was to acquire a wide-range of data about Niagara’s agritourism industry and its role within the regional economic

development process. The date and place of each interview was pre-arranged via the follow-up telephone conversation. All of the interviews took place in the key informants' work environment for the purpose of his or her comfort and safety (Dunn, 2005). The interview was audio-recorded (with the participant's permission) in order to obtain the exact words of key informants and to provide an opportunity to write additional field notes regarding body language, atmosphere, and background noise (Byrne, 2012). Prior to the interview, the informants were reminded of the research project's intended purpose and its associated confidentiality procedures. In addition, informants were also granted the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and the right to decline to answer any questions to which they felt uncomfortable.

The length of each interview was approximately thirty to ninety minutes. Each interview was arranged in a semi-structured format in order to direct the conversation in a somewhat orderly fashion while still allowing for issues to be addressed and expressed by key informants in a flexible manner (Byrne, 2012). The interview questions had an open-ended design and were strategically grouped into four main categories: the changing state of Niagara's agricultural economy; the stakeholder's personal experience with agritourism; his/her viewpoints regarding current planning and economic development policies; and their ideas for (re) branding rural Niagara as an agritourism destination and/or enhancing the success of its agritourism operations (Appendix 2 and Appendix 3). The choice to order the interview questions in a manner that combined both funnel and pyramid structures (Dunn, 2005) was made as a means of probing preliminary ideas and statements about agritourism into those that were more abstract, reflexive, and meaningful. This allowed me to gather various points-of-view about agritourism as an

economic development strategy and raised new questions about the opportunities and constraints for agritourism in the Niagara Region.

3.2.4 Transcription and Analysis

Interview transcription took place approximately one week after the interview material was collected in its entirety. I undertook the task of transcribing in order to narrow the possibility of misinterpretation and to ensure that references to non-audible occurrences, such as body language, were reported (Dunn, 2005). All of the interviews were transcribed word-for-word so that no data were mistakenly omitted. Once the process of converting speech to text was completed, each informant was given an electronic copy of his or her transcript for review, both to improve the quality of records and to keep them actively involved in the research process (Dunn, 2005). In total, over sixteen hours of data were transcribed for this project.

After the key informants had an opportunity to review and return their transcripts, processes of immersion took place. The transcript data were treated as a resource for they were 'read' as a means to report what a phenomenon, event, or social interaction 'looks like' to an individual based on their lived experience (Byrne, 2012; Rivas, 2012). Each transcript was read several times in order to make the data familiar and decrease sensitivity to underlying meanings. Memos were also recorded on a separate piece of paper to recap my personal comments, impressions, difficulties, and ideas about the research process. The memos were not formally coded or included in the overall findings of this paper.

Following the above stages of preparation, I engaged in the manual coding of

transcript data by adopting thematic analysis techniques and principles. The transcripts were coded sentence by sentence to arrive at the first set of open codes. The tools I used to code the data were derived from Rabiee's (2004) study, which adopted the Krueger (1994) approach as a means to analyze focus group and interview data (Figure 8). All of the open codes emerged from the data set inductively. Some of these codes were classified as insignificant to the research problem and were later removed. Other open codes evolved into analytic categories via the grouping of codes that were similar across the data set (Rivas, 2012). Each category was accompanied by a description as a means to turn ideas into abstract themes that were more concrete. Overall, the process of thematic coding was messy in that it involved the constant comparison of all the bits and pieces of data; however, it also proved useful because it reduced a large amount of data both efficiently and effectively (Rivas, 2012; Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

Tools for Data Analysis	
•	Words: How are specific words used and what do they mean to the participant?
•	Context: When does the participant raise the topic? Does it relate to anything else?
•	Internal Consistency: Are the topics talked about differently at different times? Can this be related to anything?
•	Frequency: Why are some things repeated more frequently than others? Does this reflect their significance to the participant and is this because they have problems coming to terms with something or because they wish to be seen in a certain light? Is it significant that a particular topic is rarely mentioned, avoided, or missing?
•	Extensiveness: How much coverage is given to particular topics?
•	Intensity of comments: What positive and negative words and emphases are used and what is their significance?
•	Specificity of responses: Do the data describe an actual event or hypothetical situation? Is the first or third person used?
•	Big picture: What major trends or topics are there that cut across cases?

Figure 8: Krueger's approach to analyze data thematically (Raibee, 2004 as cited in Rivas, 2012).

3.2.5 Limitations

The limitations of this research project are primarily concerned with accessing data in the field. To begin, my affiliation with Brock University and position as a graduate

student seemed to have a negative and unanticipated impact on the information that government officials were willing to disclose. For instance, discussions that revolved around the *Greenbelt Plan* appeared to be sensitive and/or invasive topics for planners as many of these participants responded with mixed answers or phrases like “Let’s just say the Greenbelt was too little too late” or “Can I have a moment to think about that?” One participant even declined to answer questions about the Greenbelt on tape to ensure her opinion was voiced but not included in the final report. These encounters may have occurred due to fears associated with job loss or the lack of “upper-level” credentials that Master’s students like myself possess. Perhaps some respondents felt that I was being too “nosey” or would misrepresent statements and disseminate them into the public sphere haphazardly. In any case, these encounters indicate a level of distrust with my research, and perhaps even with me, even though I am ethically bound to keep all information confidential and indicated this to the participants on numerous occasions. This experience is not unique to my research as other graduate students (e.g. Epp, 2013) conducted interviews in the Niagara Region and had certain pieces of information withheld because of her affiliation with educational institutions and possibly even due to her surname, which she shared with prominent, but unrelated, community figures. Ultimately, these barriers to accessing data influenced the ways in which my data were collected and how my interpretations were shaped.

A second limitation is tied to the spatial distribution of respondents throughout the Niagara Region. The main issue is that the vast majority of data were collected from municipalities in the central-south portion of the Region and rarely includes perspectives and/or experiences from agritourism operators, government officials, and representatives

from local organizations in the north despite repeated attempts to contact participants in this area. This lack of response in northern municipalities is attributed to the time of year that the interviews took place as well as the type of agricultural activities that operate above and below the Escarpment. Since the interviews were scheduled to run throughout the months of May and June, it is assumed that agritourism operators in the central-north were entering their busiest time of year as many follow-up calls were ignored or had conversations along the lines of “My husband is busy working in the field and trying to plant seeds before it rains. Can we call you back after 7:00 pm?” Coincidentally, the vast majority of central-north farmers work on lands below or adjacent to the Escarpment where specialty-crop and/or prime agricultural area designations dominate and fill the landscape with more demanding crops that are better suited for agritourism. These circumstances are quite opposite in the central-south as farmers are mainly cash-croppers that work in good general agricultural land designations above the escarpment and are limited with what they can do in terms of agritourism. Not only does this increase the amount of contact time for agritourism operators in the central-south; it also reduces the amount of complaints and/or applications that central-south officials have to review. In such, the failure to access data in the northern part of Niagara has skewed the data set and can only result in a partial representation of how this aspect of reality unfolds.

3.3. Conclusion

This chapter began by providing a detailed overview of the Niagara Region, which is the case under study for this research. The purpose of this was to add context. I chose to include information that described population characteristics, geographic landscapes,

economic sectors, and regulatory frameworks. These are the various components that make up the Niagara Region and/or have the potential to affect (either positively or negatively) the development of the agritourism industry.

The latter part of this chapter discussed the methodology employed. I made use of key informant interviews to determine if agritourism development serves as a viable economic development strategy for the Niagara Region to pursue. I acknowledge that the data collected from the key informant interview process is not generalizable because it is specific to the case study and research questions, as well as the opinions, beliefs, and values the participants shared throughout the entirety of this thesis. I consider the data to be robust, for I made a continuous effort to add breadth and depth to the study by incorporating a large number of participants. I also utilized a series of “checks” to ensure the data established (and maintained) trustworthiness (Bradshaw and Stratford, 2005). For example, I documented each stage of the research process against other academic sources; the Brock University Research Ethics Board granted permission to implement the interview procedure; my supervisory committee aided with data interpretations; and the findings were distributed to participants (prior to publication) to make sure an accurate depiction of their words were displayed. Overall, the research method I used provides a unique form of research that is uncommon in contemporary rural geography. Not only does it (re) produce new bodies of knowledge; it also strengthens the importance of my research vis-à-vis existing research.

CHAPTER 4:

THE CURRENT STATUS OF NIAGARA'S AGRITOURISM INDUSTRY

The topic under study emerged as a response to the changes brought forth by agricultural restructuring and other external forces, such as globalization. These forces negatively affect the agricultural landscape in Niagara for they alter traditional modes of production and confront farmers with financial hardship since they must compete against corporate farms and can no longer rely on food processing plants like CanGro Foods or Cadbury Schweppes to buy their produce. Planners, economic developers, and policy makers are working hard to solve this problem and many within the different municipalities have looked to agritourism as a probable solution. Accordingly, the purpose of this chapter is to explore the current status of Niagara's agritourism industry. Through the perspectives and experiences of agritourism operators, government officials, and representatives of local organizations, a series of themes were devised to better understand how this industry is operating on the ground. The themes are organized into two distinct categories, opportunities and constraints, which serve as the underlying structure for this chapter. Subsequently, Chapter Five will utilize some of these findings to provide recommendations that might enhance the future development of the agritourism industry in the Niagara Region.

4.1. Opportunities

This section of the chapter begins by describing the opportunities that make the situation in Niagara favourable for agritourism development and/or put the industry in a good position for advancement. The opportunities include: the use of place-based

development; entrepreneurs' knowledge of product; high quality standards; and the presence of strategic partnerships. All of these opportunities emerged from the data set collected throughout the key informant interview process. Supplementary data were also obtained from websites as a means to support the interview data and ensure accuracy. The information gathered is vital as it can determine whether or not agritourism is a viable development trajectory for the Niagara Region or if another option is more feasible to pursue.

4.1.1. Place-Based Development

A significant theme that emerged from the Niagara case study is the capacity of local stakeholders to utilize non-conventional types of rural development strategies that shy away from the more traditional “smokestack chasing” of primary or secondary industries. This theme arose when many of Niagara's stakeholders in the wine and grape growing sector responded with place-based development strategies to questions about the ingredients necessary to create a successful agritourism venture. Answers particularly revolved around Niagara's unique bundle of assets, which mainly deal with the natural, physical, and human endowments the Region has to offer. Also, there was a strong tendency for the aforementioned group of stakeholders to play on images of these assets to create a competitive advantage. For example, an employee of a winery in Niagara-on-the-Lake (NOTL) explains the value of utilizing rural space to attract consumers and increase their satisfaction. She states:

What we looked at was by putting in picnic tables, Muskoka chairs, and the grapes in between the rows [in the parking lot], and you might notice when you leave, although it's a little early, people just sitting there having a glass of wine. They don't want a tour; they don't want to taste; they want to have

a glass of wine. They're enjoying the vineyards, the view, the countryside, and the Escarpment because we take for granted how many people live in the city. So we've allowed them this beautiful place to sit and even if it's raining they can be in [name removed for confidentiality] where we put in more windows or they can be um you know there's other areas of the winery that they can enjoy. But again, we want to connect them with the vineyards most of all, which is why the bigger windows were put in recently (Interview #10, p. 9).

This individual understands consumers visit the winery to tour and taste but goes even further by paying attention to tertiary needs associated with Niagara's bucolic landscape. The assets she focused on include the scenic view of the vineyards and the hill-like topography of the Escarpment, which surround the geography of NOTL. These assets are strategic in that they enable consumers to feel tranquil, as if they have escaped city life. More important, they are enhanced through the operators' decision to renovate the windows and the introduction of seating arrangements that display the "rural." A place-based development strategy is thus a positive approach for agritourism operators to pursue if they understand how to use their asset base effectively.

4.1.2. Agritourism Operators' Knowledge of Product

The first few interviews indicated that agritourism operators' knowledge of product and/or service was poor after partaking in discussion about the current status of Niagara's agritourism industry. This perception derived mainly from government officials' opinions of what is happening with on-the-ground operations because some of them made comments about operators' loss of interest in farming (Interview #4), lack of confidence in product (Interview #1), and failure to adapt to a changing business environment (Interview #8). Alternately, when operators themselves were asked similar questions some new light was shed in regards to the ways in which they understood how the

agritourism product and/or service is evolving into an experienced-based industry that features entertainment at most of its venues. Agritourism operators grasp this shift quite well as they are in the process of adjusting their business models so they do not fall behind. For example, an operator that attends a farmers' market on a weekly basis states: "You used to think...do they want a fifty-pound bag or a hundred-pound bag of potatoes? Now, they want a little quart of potatoes with a little recipe book about how to do something novel with it" (Interview #11, p.4). The operator recognizes consumers want to purchase something more than a simple vegetable; they want to go home and entertain guests by serving unique dishes they can make with that vegetable. Clearly, he understands consumer preferences have changed and adjusts his method of sale accordingly. This is not the only vendor that possesses such knowledge as others consider entertainment to be an important part of the agritourism industry. The discussion I had with the farmers' market coordinator at the same venue confers this finding:

Researcher: Do you have any unique products that are being sold at the [Name Removed] Farmer's Market?

Participant: Some of our farmers...they've been farmers their whole lives and they may be retired now but they just want to do it for fun or educate people about farming and that's something I think our farmers [do] pretty well. They have events for kids...

Researcher: What kind of events?

Participant: So they will do like a salsa contest so people can make their own salsa and there's different categories and the farmers will judge the salsa. They also do a pumpkin growing contest. So they give kids the seeds at this time of year and at the end of the season the kids come back... there is a contest like largest pumpkin and, you know, roundest pumpkin (Interview #8, p.2).

The participant is unaware that she labeled product at the farmer's market as entertainment for children and, much like the previous example, she demonstrates awareness for change in consumer preferences. It appears as though operators do have

knowledge of their product. Moreover, they have utilized this knowledge to promote but also reconnect people of all ages to the family farm and thereby move the industry forward.

4.1.3. Quality Standards

Yet another opportunity derives from the quality standard of products sold to consumers. The best example is the Vintners Quality Alliance (VQA) brand, which regulates the wine portion of the agritourism industry in Niagara through a unique set of standards. These standards are created by the wine authority under the *Vintners Quality Alliance Act (1999)* and cover four areas of interest: grape variety and ripeness; winemaking techniques; labeling requirements and packaging; and sensory and chemical criteria for finished wine (VQA Ontario, 2015c). Many times these standards serve to build a quality brand that consumers trust when they purchase products. The Director of Viticulture at a winery demonstrates this when he brought a bottle of ice wine to the interview to show how label requirements and packaging standards prevent black market scares at trade shows. He states (while pointing at the bottle):

It's a gold vase bottle, it has a cartouche here, and it has a proof tag. All of these three factors with this quality of glass make everything in that package, plus that packaging you see behind you... those little boxes and they've got tissue with them to make that whole packaging and develop a trust factor. The Chinese market is a higher risk factor in that when they buy a product in China they are very afraid it is a knock-off. So, when they come here they purchase larger amounts because the quality is identified (Interview #16, p.5).

The labeling described by the participant is established by VQA standards, which strictly require the letters "VQA", the appellation name, the vintage year, and the VQA logo in accordance with the VQA graphics standards manual on the proof tag (VQA Ontario,

2015b). The glass bottle is also a requirement as VQA standards prohibit the sale of product packaged in non-glass containers and of particular size (VQA Ontario, 2015a). These standards and various others ensure consumers that they are purchasing a product of quality, as a slight deviation can identify a product as fake or of lesser quality. The VQA brand is something the agritourism industry should be proud of and definitely a source of opportunity when it comes to product sales for Niagara wine.

In correlation with the standards associated with the VQA is the quality that emerges from technological improvement in the wine and grape growing faction of



Figure 9: Example of a wind machine (Huellemann, 2015).



Figure 10: Example of a bird banger (Huellemann, 2015).

industry. The most obvious example is the wind machine (Figure 9) or bird banger (Figure 10); however, participants also made note of crop and canopy management techniques in the vineyard to improve the quality of *vitis vinifera* grapes⁶. For example, a public relations manager at an estate-owned winery explained a technique called crop

⁶ Note: Grape varieties native to the area, such as *Vitis Labrusca* and *Vitis Riparia*, are no longer used to produce wine since the VQA only allows the *Vitis Vinifera* variety to be used in winemaking.

thinning, which is used to increase vine size, berry weight and cluster, and the brix level⁷ of grapes before they are removed for processing. She states:

So, let's say we want the brix level to be twenty-two. Um, if in turn it has rained a lot and that brix level is oriented to dilute and drop, we would thin out the number of branches on the vine so the nutrients would go to what's left. It's like if you've ever grown tomatoes. If you try to grow twelve on a vine they won't taste as delicious as if you take six of those green ones off and, as they start to get bigger, the six left are going to be so delicious that you're glad you've got the quality over quantity (Interview #10, p.6).

Crop thinning benefits this winery as the removal of branches counteracts challenges associated with weather and produces quality grapes that meet or exceed VQA standards. Crop management techniques similar in nature include shoot thinning and pre- and post-veraison thinning. Canopy management techniques like basal leaf removal and hedging are also practiced as a means to produce high quality grapes and wines.

In addition to the quality standard of products in the wine and grape growing sector is the value-added nature of agritourism products. In the case of Niagara, the value-added mainly derives from innovative steps operators take to introduce high-quality products to the market. A popular example of this is a product called ice syrup, which is merely a combination of 100% real Canadian maple syrup and ice wine. It is perceived to be of quality in the mind of the consumer because it is “new” and made from one or more products authentic to the Region. Another value-added product is an educational tour that features aquaponics in a dome-like structure that sits on the ground. The owner of this operation chose to incorporate this as a means to demonstrate the various ways humans can grow food without electricity and minimize their impact on the environment. He says: “There are people that are sensitive to these issues and they love to come here, take a look at the bio-dome, [and] see what we're doing and how we're doing it. It's not

⁷ Brix level refers to the sugar content of grapes on the vine.

offered anywhere else in Niagara” (Interview #13, p.18). This product is similarly popular because it offers a new way to reconnect people to the farm, which adds to its quality. These products are, however, just a few of those considered value-added as many others of equal or greater quality exist and provide agritourists with an opportunity to be explored.

4.1.4. Strategic Partnerships

The final opportunity involves the use of strategic partnerships. Every participant in this study agreed that strategic partnerships are of great value, or have the potential to be, if they were incorporated into individual operations. Interviewees who were involved in strategic partnerships demonstrate how the value of such has benefited them, particularly in areas of marketing. For example, the Director of Viticulture at a family-owned winery states: “The most successful marketing we have is the group marketing, which is the Wineries of Niagara-on-the-Lake. That’s major for the nine or ten thousand bucks they put into it [because] the payback is twenty times that. So everybody should be doing that as a group” (Interview #16, p. 20). This participant is eager to explain how thirty-plus wineries in Niagara-on-the-Lake pool funds for precision marketing so that the owners can attract consumers to their operation with ease. Later, he also explains other ways to market through his membership with the VQA and participation in the Niagara Wine Festival as well as the International Cool Climate Chardonnay Celebration (IC4). Not once did he talk poorly of those with whom he developed a partnership and he treats his partners with respect, mainly by referring to them as “colleagues” rather than “competitors” throughout the interview. Strategic partnerships evidently benefit and give

opportunity to several wineries in the Niagara Region by way of marketing, especially those in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Wineries are not the only type of agritourism venture that makes use of strategic partnerships nor is the municipality of Niagara-on-the-Lake. Agritourism operators involved in sales of value-added products at farmers' markets, on-site retail stores, and farm-to-table restaurants are also developing strategic partnerships for marketing purposes. The best example of partnerships are those formed with Twenty Valley Tourism Association (TVTA) in Lincoln, which is a designated marketing organization (DMO) that promotes events and places to eat, play, shop, and stay in the Niagara Region. A worker at this association brought a brochure to the interview to demonstrate the value of this partnership after a membership is purchased. He states (while pointing at the brochure):

This is our new map. So, we've got over a hundred different properties on there. We made a conservative effort a couple years ago to drop what a farm market pays. So we charge them \$250.00. They get a placement on the map. They get a placement on the website. We [print] 120,000 [copies] of these maps. So they go to all the Ontario Travel Centers (OTC), Canadian Automobile Association (CAA) offices, other tourism offices, and then through Creative Theatre Marketing (CTM) into the downtown hotels in Toronto (Interview #15, p.10).

This partnership seems to be invaluable to agritourism enterprises that are short on funds since owners pay a small fee to have their operation advertised at many places across Ontario. A better trade-off is unlikely considering the average cost of producing brochures or developing a website as an individual entity. Thus, strategic partnerships seem to be a worthwhile investment, especially if marketing is not an operator's expertise. Those in agritourism should continue to form, if not expand, their strategic partnerships as it fosters a path to opportunity, which is something this industry needs to

thrive.

4.2. Constraints

The latter half of this chapter provides a detailed overview of constraints that restrict and/or place limits on the (in) tangible goods and services agritourism operators provide for the agritourist community. The constraints are listed in an order that ranges from most to least constraining and primarily consist of: strict regulatory frameworks; marketing-related barriers; poor government support; physical geography; the competitive nature of the industry; and youth retention problems. Each constraint emerged from the data set collected throughout the key informant interview process and, much like the opportunities section of this chapter, supplementary data were also obtained from websites to provide support. In addition, policy documents were also used to find evidence that might further illustrate the constraints participants experienced prior to and throughout the duration of this study.

4.2.1. Regulatory Frameworks

As explained in Chapter Three, the provincial government created the *Greenbelt Plan* in 2004 as a means to protect over 1.8 million acres of agricultural and environmentally sensitive land in the GGH from urban development and urban sprawl. This designation is inclusive of lands situated within the Niagara Escarpment and is required to follow policies set out by the Niagara Escarpment Plan (NEP) if any property is or has the potential to be developed within its boundaries. These rules and regulations place constraints on the agritourism industry because operations located in the NEP area are

limited in terms of the type of activities they can pursue. For example, the NEP restricts the sale of goods for small-scale commercial uses to “produce grown on the property or produced on the property from the produce grown on the property” (NEC, 2005, p.62). Yet this regulation is not economically feasible for operators since it reduces the sale of goods or forces the owner to relocate part of his/her operation to another property, which may or may not have services. One agritourism operator, in particular, displayed a high degree of frustration with such regulations when recapping her experience constructing a retail store on the main lot. She states:

...our bush is across the road on a separate piece of property – it is not on this property. So, it would be alright with them if we were to get permission to do all of this on the bush lot, which has no services. We’d have to put all the services in; we’d have to cut down trees to be able to do that – that would be fine but we couldn’t have it here. They were going to shut us down because your processing... your product [has] to be on the same property. So, we fought that and that was a very big fight to get through and get that (Interview #12, p. 9).

The agritourism operator goes on to explain the hoops she had to jump through, ranging from phone calls to a number of rejected applications from the Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC). In addition, she noted that because of her location in the Greenbelt, the NEC was able to dictate how and when the construction of the store took place, indicating a lack of control over personal property and an unfair disadvantage to operators in the Greenbelt. This situation is not unique to this operator as other participants experienced difficulties constructing fruit stands and sales barns on lots adjacent to the main lot or had their applications denied. Many operators came to the conclusion that “policies in the Greenbelt protect the farmland, not the farmer” (Interview #6, p.6). A consensus was also made that the Greenbelt, as a planning document, lacks an economic strategy and is in serious need of revision if agritourism is to succeed in the

future.

A second constraint that applies to this subsection deals directly with the rules and regulations of the NEP. As stated, an objective of the NEP is to encourage agricultural uses and permit uses that are compatible with farming, including accessory uses that directly support agriculture (NEP, 2005, p.61). This objective, in addition to preserving agricultural land, is strictly enforced throughout the NEP but lacks clarity as rules and regulations are not established for different types of agritourism enterprises, except wineries and winery incidental uses. Instead, the rules and regulations set out in the document are very general, pigeonholing all types of operations in the same category and simply referring to them as “small-scale agriculture” (NEP, 2005). This act of generalizing is not panning out well for on-the-ground operations because it is making it difficult for participants in this study to be creative with their business and/or forcing them to abide by the rules and regulations of a winery if they want to expand. An educational tour operator encountered this situation when trying to construct a breakfast restaurant as an accessory use. She states:

It was different than anything else that has gone through the Escarpment Commission so they were trying to put us into a group that they already dealt with basically instead of trying to look at as an individual. [This] is a totally different industry and they [were] just trying to plunk us into a category that fit right? So because of that, because of the generality of trying to um categorize people, it kind of hurt us and made it very difficult to afford what we wanted to do (Interview #12, p. 9).

For this operator, the failure of the NEC to make a specific set of rules and regulations resulted in financial hardship when trying to introduce an idea that boosts product sales and supports the continued use of agriculture in the area. Currently, the rules and regulations of the NEP do not appear to benefit certain types of agritourism operations.

They should be adjusted to create an even playing field for all types of enterprises in the industry.

A further example of the ways in which rules and regulations constrain agritourism in Niagara relates to the industry's affiliation with the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (AGCO). On May 01, 2014, the AGCO introduced a two-year pilot project to sell VQA wine at farmers' markets across Ontario in order to expand distribution channels and promote local food and drink. So far, the project has achieved some of these goals but its greatest success has resulted in what is perceived by some to be an unfair advantage for a few agritourism operators because of AGCO regulations, which "only enable the rich to get richer" (Interview #13, p.9). This is a shared view among respondents that do not sell wine product, especially those that produce fruit wine, since the AGCO only allows VQA wine, as the term is defined in the *Vintners Quality Alliance Act (1999)*, to be sold at occasional extensions of winery retail stores (AGCO, 2015). The reason why these respondents are upset is because small fruit wine makers originally proposed the project yet they received no benefits. Their argument is "a wine is a wine whether it's a grape, which is a fruit, or another type of fruit. The [AGCO] should not be distinguishing from one or another or allowing one and then not the other" (Interview #12, p.3). The AGCO decision to differentiate between products limits the sale of non-VQA wine to on-site retail stores but opens the door for VQA producers to sell at new outlets in addition to ones they already have, such as the Internet, Wine Rack and Wine Shop stores, the Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO) stores, individual retail stores, and through licensing agreements with restaurants and hotels. The aforementioned AGCO regulation seems to be perceived as exclusionary by non-VQA producers. The

AGCO may want to consider permitting the sale of both VQA and fruit wine at Ontario farmers' markets if the pilot project becomes a full-fledged operation in 2016. Both are fruit products. Moreover, both are derived from agricultural activities that take place in Niagara.

From the previous paragraph, it is clear AGCO regulations favour VQA wine and the retail sale of such products at Ontario farmers' markets. Yet the grass is not so green for these agritourism operators or as green *per se*. When asked about the challenges agritourism operators face those in the wine sector voiced similar opinions about the AGCO, with many stating its regulatory framework makes it difficult for any winery, whether it be boutique, farm or estate, to get involved in the pilot project. Comments like these are mainly directed at regulations that disallow wineries to store wine in a truck or off-site warehouse prior to or following sales at a particular farmers' market (AGCO, 2015). According to the operator of an estate winery in Niagara-on-the-Lake, the cost factors associated with this regulation are huge when simply trying to sell product and get the VQA brand out to consumers far away. He states:

In essence, we have to [use Purolator] or [...] dispatch wine to our agents... say if they're selling in an Ottawa market or if they're selling in Peterborough because they can't physically drive here, pick up the wine, go to the market, sell it, and then drive back and deliver it at the end of the day (Interview #16, p.6).

Trucking is a significant cost for this operator seeing that AGCO regulations require owners to pay employees for the time it takes to deliver and vend products (and pay for gas) or hire a private company to do the job. The operator also notes in the interview there is no way to reduce these costs or be creative with the regulation, such as by selling one's "neighbour's" wine, because the AGCO further prohibits cross-selling of wine

product. The operators' final comment about the AGCO is that "it's a mutt's game whether you're going to really sell anything or make any profit" (Interview 16, p.7). Currently, AGCO regulations do not appear to make financial sense for agritourism operators who wish to travel to farmers' markets outside of the Niagara Region. The AGCO may want to consider being more sensitive to cost-related issues if the pilot project is to be successful beyond 2016 at venues close and afar.

Yet another constraint is the regulations imposed by interprovincial trade barriers on 100% Canadian wine. Interprovincial trade barriers exist because the federal government and corresponding provincial legislation introduced the *Importation of Intoxicating Liquors Act (1928)* to prevent the movement of alcoholic beverages across provincial borders (St. Catharines-Thorold Chamber of Commerce, 2009). The purpose of this legislation may be for the safety of Canadian citizens but, because it is long-standing, the *Act* has done much more than just make it illegal for any person to transport or deliver alcohol from say Ontario to Quebec. It has also made it a criminal offense for entrepreneurs to conduct online sales with out-of-province consumers because the regulations were designed long before the Internet (St. Catharines-Thorold Chamber of Commerce, 2009). Further, the *Act* has made it illegal for out-of-province consumers to join a wine club from their favourite winery or even take one bottle of Niagara wine home (St. Catharines-Thorold Chamber of Commerce, 2009). The industry's key actors are not pleased with this at all. Here is what the planner of a thoroughly involved municipality had to say: "Get rid of these artificial barriers for interprovincial trade! They've got to get rid of it. It's ridiculous! You can't, I mean, you can trade more easily to the South than you can to the East and West" (Interview #3, p.5). According to this

planner, interprovincial trade barriers are considered unnecessary red tape since consumers in the U.S. (and even China) have better access to Niagara wine than Canadians. The loosening of regulations on interprovincial trade is thereby important to consider since it has the potential to expand market access, which further increases sales of domestic wine for agritourism entrepreneurs in the Niagara Region.

The final constraint associated with regulatory frameworks is that which pertains to individual municipalities. Many constraints exist at the municipal level but when asked about the challenges agritourism operators face, the one that participants cited most regularly was out-of-date Official Plans (OP). Some municipal OPs do not anticipate for agritourism because they were drafted long before the term developed into a “buzz word” and have not made any related amendments since the Regional Official Plan (ROP) and PPS included value-added and farm diversification policies in their political agenda. The Township of Wainfleet’s OP, for example, was drafted in 1978 and does not make any reference to agritourism. This makes it very difficult for entrepreneurs to create a start-up operation since regulations are not explicitly laid out and therefore cannot their guide their activity. The planner of this municipality reiterates this point using his own words. He states:

Essentially, we need the rules to be updated. Let’s call it that. Right now, if you have someone who wants to do something they really have to be motivated to find out what the rules are and be willing to work with government to change them to work for their own purposes (Interview #2, p.4).

At the time of the interview, the planner acknowledged that the OP needs revision but that this is a reactive process in Wainfleet. He noted that he hopes to change this throughout the time frame of his employment by implementing a proactive set of

regulations that allow for agritourism to happen or, at the very least, to complement other agricultural operations in the municipality.

4.2.2. Marketing-related barriers

Another challenging aspect of agritourism is the ability of operators to market their product or service. Marketing is defined by Boone et al. (2010) as the total sum of activities involved in the transfer of goods from producer to consumer. It includes four P's – product, price, promotion, and place – hereafter referred to as “the marketing mix.” The former two P's do not apply to this section – they are not problematic from the viewpoint of participants. The latter P's, however, are of great concern and will be addressed below.

Understanding how to promote an operation is a troublesome issue for agritourism operators that have not established a strategic partnership. Promotion involves creating awareness for what is being offered; however, some operators are perhaps less effective than they could be in getting their message out to the public. This argument is supported by the considerable amount of ventures that have yet to be discovered by tourists, including locals. The reason for this is twofold. First, many agritourism operators neglect the use of promotional tools like an updated website (or any website) and do not make effective use social media sites, such as Facebook or Twitter. Second, regional branding strategies, such as those crafted by the Tourism Partnership of Niagara (TPN)⁸, focused too heavily on Niagara Falls and the Clifton Hill entertainment district in the past, which

⁸ The TPN was established in 2010 by the OMTCS as one of the provinces Regional Tourism Offices (RTO). It represents all twelve of Niagara's municipalities and, according to its website, has intentions of building a strong relevant brand that maintains the Region's reputation as a world-renowned destination for leisure and meetings, conventions, & incentive travel opportunities (MCIT) (TPN, 2013).

led consumers to believe these areas are all the Region encompasses. Thus, even if entrepreneurs do use the aforementioned promotional tools, they often go unnoticed and, as a result, agritourism operations continue to remain a hidden treasure. The planner of a municipality reiterates this point after being asked whether there are particular types of agritourism ventures that have a greater chance of success than others. Originally, she commented that operations in rural areas might be more successful because some tourists want to visit areas outside of the main tourist hub in Niagara Falls. But, she continued by stating:

It's ridiculous! It's so diverse from NOTL down to Wainfleet as far as agriculture and the farmscapes. It is interesting but it's not really advertised. I don't think anyone who comes here knows what happens outside of, you know, along the [Niagara] River" (Interview #4, p.4).

Essentially, the planner is acknowledging that the promotion aspect of the marketing mix needs work because tourists are left in the dark when it comes to visiting municipalities in the Region except Niagara Falls, which is where the Niagara River is located, and many of its respective attractions. A solution to this constraint should be developed to help make agritourism operations known.

In correlation with promotion is the place aspect of the marketing mix. Some agritourism operators in the Niagara Region, particularly those located outside the main tourist destination, do not know how to market the place of their operation effectively. An agritourism operator that previously ran a B&B on a farm in Fort Erie demonstrates this after being asked about the type of activities he has to offer. The operator responded by giving a detailed list of current activities, which include the sale of value-added products and participation in trade shows across the world. Shortly after he revealed information of the B&B's closure. He states:

The bed & breakfast, I mean we closed that a) because of the animals and b) because we just weren't busy enough. Everybody goes to NOTL because it's a bed and breakfast community with the Shaw [Festival] and the different shows and that. So, for somebody that wants to go to a show in NOTL and have to drive half an hour here or somebody that in Niagara Falls wants to drive twenty minutes here...it's out of the way (Interview #14, p. 6).

The agritourism operator makes a fair assumption as to why consumers were disinterested in his B&B; however, proximity to events is not the only factor that results in closure of an operation. There is anecdotal evidence that this operator is too focused on the unique attributes of other places rather than his own property. His property is located amongst a beautiful rural setting that offers peace and tranquility to consumers, especially those who think NOTL and Niagara Falls is too chaotic. The outcome of his B&B might have been different had he marketed this image of place in his vacation package (although it is difficult to determine since the operation is no longer in business).

4.2.3. Poor Government Support

It is apparent from the interview process that the support the provincial government provides for small-scale agritourism operators is poor when it comes to funding. Funding opportunities are difficult for this group to receive despite OMAFRA's attempt to encourage agricultural entrepreneur's to apply for financial aid programs that focus on workforce development, business development, and research development goals (OMAFRA, 2014a). Generally, this gives the impression that agritourism is recognized as an economic driver by government and has the potential to alleviate financial hardship through on-farm employment rather than forcing farmers to seek additional means of employment off the farm. Yet several key informants challenge this support from government, with many indicating they had a negative experience with OMAFRA's

application process or that there was a low application approval rate. A popular example is the experience shared when applying for Growing Forward 2, a multi-level framework aimed at encouraging innovation, competitiveness, and market development in Ontario's agri-food and agri-product sector via cost-share programs (OMAFRA, 2014b). In particular, one agritourism operator seemed extremely frustrated when recounting her experience with this program,

The one you have to pay for the whole thing first and then you get fifty percent back. A lot of times that's really hard to come up with that type of money okay? And the number two is you have to be really good at explaining yourself and, generally speaking, a farmer just likes to farm; he likes to till the soil; he likes to pick the fruit; he just wants to do those things. Paper work is also an atrocity for them and a lot of people are just like 'you know what? Forget it!' (Interview #12, p.15-16).

After listening to this participant, and hearing similar complaints from others, it seems as though the page length of the application for Growing Forward 2 is overbearing and too demanding for start-up agritourism operations or those already dealing with financial hardship. Moreover, it would appear as though the application requires a specific type of wording to be accepted and that this wording is more suited for those who have completed some type of degree in higher education. Agritourism operators applying, however, do not always have the capacity to fill out the extensive paperwork and, as such, feel time spent in the field is more productive than filling out applications. Currently, the support provided by government, specifically OMAFRA, appears to be more burdensome than beneficial for small-scale enterprises. This situation, however, is not so accurate for large-scale enterprises or those involved in a partnership, as it was found these groups of participants are able to pool together funds and have access to a labour force that can

understand the terminology of applications and have the time to do so. Indeed, a participant that worked for a wine and grape growing organization stated:

We get lots of support from government so we can't complain. We just got twelve million for agricultural support; we're getting another fifteen starting next year. But we have also applied for marketing through Growing Forward 2. So there is money available if you want to work to get it (Interview #18, p.9).

The difference in funds received is vast between these two types of enterprises. It would appear that the applications granted by OMAFRA also favour large-scale enterprises, particularly those with partnerships, in addition to yielding a low success rate for small-scale enterprises.

4.2.4. Physical Geography

A constraint akin to the topic of geography is that which relates to the physical geography atop the Niagara Escarpment. Specifically, participants in this study discussed how the soil in municipalities above the Escarpment is rich with clay particles and that these particles are far too close to the surface to allow for agritourism operations other than those that complement the main agricultural activity, which is cash cropping. This is highly disadvantageous for operators located in this area as they can only offer a handful of products and/or services to consumers and, many times, those offered are considered “lower-tier.” For example, an educational tour on soybeans generates nowhere near the amount of profit as a wine tour. Neither does a farm-stay vacation amidst a cornfield or a crop maze. Thus, Niagara's physical geography is a major reason as to why agritourism operations are not as plentiful in municipalities above the Escarpment in comparison to below. This is confirmed by an economic developer who states: “We have farms but

[agritourism] is limited. We're right on top of the escarpment so our soils are not as good as it is down in NOTL or Lincoln" (Interview #5, p. 13).

4.2.5. Competition

Another set of findings reflects the competitive nature of the agritourism industry. These are presented in a fashion that ranges from most constraining to least. The most constraining aspect is land-use competition because urban boundaries continue to expand into agricultural areas for reasons associated with urban-to-rural migration. Specifically, urban retirees migrate to the Niagara Region to live amongst or near elements that identify with the rural idyll. The Region accommodated for this by converting valuable pieces of farmland into housing developments. In doing so, it posed serious ramifications for agritourism because operators are now competing with an outsider group of homeowners for land. The owners of a U-pick farm in Pelham expressed this in detail after being asked to discuss their perspective on the ways in which Niagara's agricultural economy has changed since they opened their operation in the 1990s:

Participant 1: I think one of the most significant changes in the last generation has just been pressure on agricultural lands for other uses...for development primarily. And so, you know, if you are in our shoes and are looking for land resources you're competing with interests that are non-agricultural and much of our best agricultural land has been developed, particularly in the area between the Escarpment and Lake Ontario. That's not where we are...but even here, I mean, almost every time a farm sells it sells as an estate property by somebody who we perceive to have, you know, deep pockets and they tend to buy estate-type homes.

Researcher: [Are] they from Toronto usually?

Participant 2: Always

Participant 1: We'll say urban people. We won't necessarily say Toronto but a lot of them are and, you know, they're looking for a country property after they retire and in their world the value of that exceeds what an agricultural operation can justify (Interview #11, p.1).

The pressures on land use by exurbanites, most of whom are retired, seems to be hampering this agritourism operator's ability to expand operations onto lands adjacent to their property since this group of outsiders are most likely wealthy and can willingly outbid operators if they really want to purchase a piece of land. This is a huge threat to agritourism because it has the potential to take agricultural land out of production permanently. Moreover, it also prevents agritourism operators from purchasing land in the future since property values surrounded by estate-type homes will eventually increase over time.

A second constraint is competition with grocery store chains. The grocery store is a one-stop-shop that is able to supply consumers with products at a cheaper price than most farmers. This attracts consumers who are willing to forgo freshness to save a few dollars on select products. At the same time, it dramatically affects sales at roadside stands and farmers' markets because the vendors cannot afford to lower their prices since they are unable to achieve economies of scale. A vendor that attends a farmers market on a weekly basis expressed this by stating:

You still go back to looking at your local grocery store player. Food Basics has got twenty-pound bag of potatoes on for \$0.99. How do we compete with that when it costs us ten dollars to grow? So, and your customer tends to throw that back in your face too. If we have a price they'll say: "Well, the grocery store has got it for half of that or a quarter of that!" What do you say? "Go get it there, I guess." (Interview #11, p.5-6).

This vendor appears to be facing major competition from Food Basics since the price of vegetables sold at the store is incredibly low in comparison to what it costs for the average small family-owned farm in Niagara to grow. The vendor has no choice but to charge consumers more money for his/her product in order to earn a decent living as the costs associated with producing food and fibre (e.g., fertilizer, seeds, irrigation, equipment,

travel, property taxes, etc.) is higher when the output and size of the operation is smaller. It is likely that consumers do not take these costs into consideration when they purchase product. As such, the grocery store remains one of the top competitors for operators in the agritourism industry. It seems to offer a price that is too hard to beat.

Yet another constraint in this subsection deals directly with the competition from the government. This finding came as a surprise when participants were asked about types of ventures they consider their largest competition and replied with answers that pertained to the local municipality and/or the Region rather than proprietorships of a similar nature. Conversations with participants mainly revolved around competition that took place on holidays since each of the aforementioned levels of government can put on volunteer-run events for the public for free. The consequence of this is that these events make it harder for agritourism operators to generate revenue on holidays. The owners of an educational tour operation provide anecdotal evidence of this after enduring a negative experience with an event sponsored by the Niagara Region on Family Day. The conversation between the two operators unfolds as follows:

Participant 2: Yeah, Family Day was huge when it first came out. It was one of our busiest days and then things started coming up and now our attendance has gone down drastically because of all the free stuff in the Region. People always go and do the free things rather than going and supporting local businesses.

Participant 1: And paying...

Participant 2: The tax dollars...

Participant 1: It's not even about the tax dollars but the fact that we pay employees. WE ARE PAYING! A lot of those events are run by volunteers right? How do you compete with a volunteer-run event when I have to charge because I am hiring people? I have to get money back to hire them. You can't always be a free-bee (Interview #12, p.16).

The owners of this operation cannot compete against the Region's ability to offer free admission or free labour since they must charge a fee and hire workers to keep their

event afloat. The difference in price, however, is affecting attendance levels at the event, which has dropped in comparison to previous years. If absence is a reoccurring issue at this event or others the probability of these operators running more events is slim because they cannot earn enough profit or make up for lost revenue. The government needs to realize this constraint even though they are trying to do good for the public since other participant's similarly experienced this type of competition with the Town of Pelham as well as other townships on holidays like Christmas or Easter. It may be wise to let individually owned operations run events for a small fee in the future to reduce competition from sources outside the industry.

A final constraint is the competition agritourism operators face via the creation of new innovative products. The best example of this type of competition derives from artificial Christmas trees, which is non-agricultural but a product that is readily purchased by consumers during the holiday season. This product is putting choose-and-cut Christmas tree farms at risk for closure as operators can barely make any return on investment since it takes seven to eight years before a tree can be sold. Some are even looking to switch businesses altogether as was expressed by an operator after he stated:

Last year was our last year for planting trees. We are getting out of Christmas tree business and we are maybe going to go into cash crops. The Christmas tree business is slowly going the way of the do-do bird I guess you could say because people are buying those artificial trees (Interview #17, p.4).

It is hard enough for the operators of a Christmas tree farm to earn a living considering they only have four or five weeks of the year to make profit. Now, they must also compete against artificial products that can be re-used on a yearly basis. Not only does this affect current sales, it also affects profit margins in the future because consumers that purchase artificial trees are less likely to attend a family outing at a Christmas tree

farm even though it is accompanied by other experiences, such as a sleigh ride or sitting by a bonfire with a glass of hot cocoa. Competition from new and/or innovative products thereby serve as a constraint for Niagara's agritourism industry since some of them, such as an artificial Christmas tree, are powerful enough to put agritourism operations permanently out of business.

4.2.6. Youth Retention Problems

Of equivalent importance are the constraints emerging from the inability to retain youth on the farm. Youth are essential to the success of farming, but also to agritourism, as this group of individuals is most likely to inherit farmland from their elders. Additionally, youth possess skills in the new world of agriculture, such as those based in culinary and winemaking, and are risk-takers by nature. Yet these qualities are absent on the vast majority of Niagara's farms since only about eighteen percent of the population is between the ages of fifteen and twenty-nine (Statistics Canada, 2015) and very few of these individuals show interest working on a farm. The owner of an agritourism operation in Lincoln expressed this after stating:

I tried putting an ad in the paper at the Beamsville High School; I had no responses. This lady came up with two boys in grade twelve once - one lasted one day and the other one lasted one week. The young people just do not want to get their hands dirty. They don't want any part of farming...I have two boys. They don't work on the farm. Even my brother and sister's kids don't. All six grandkids don't (Interview #17, p. 10-11).

Although this operator has tried to offer employment to local youth, none seem as if they were the right candidates because there were no applications and those hired by default quit almost immediately. The operator's family also declined the opportunity because they have good paying office jobs, which the participant revealed later in the interview.

The consequences of having few youth in farming is catastrophic as most farmers are working around the clock and could certainly rely on this group to run additional enterprises like agritourism activities. Having no youth on the farm also affects other aspects of agritourism, such as farmers markets. For example, another participant stated: “It’s harder to get farmers to come to the market anymore because there’s not someone to come up and help them. And, as soon as they get old or older [they] are not able to come to the farmers markets and then we lose vendors coming out” (Interview #5, p. 3). It seems as though the only exception to this constraint is the youth who remain on the farm in NOTL. This municipality is clearly doing something right as a numerous amount of youth own or work agritourism operations on the farm. It thereby serves as a leader for other municipalities to follow.

4.3. Conclusion

This chapter explored the current status of Niagara’s agritourism industry from the perspective of agritourism operators, government officials, and representatives from local organizations. It was found that opportunities do exist in this industry; however, participants identified several or what they felt to be constraints, as well. Interestingly, agritourism operations typical of the wine and grape growing variety are less exposed to these constraints and/or are well developed to overcome them. It is for this reason that I argue agritourism operations based in wine and grape growing are more likely to be successful in the start-up or expansion stages of a business than other types of operations.

Red tape that exists in planning documents and other regulatory frameworks is

another significant finding that emerged from this chapter. Most controversial is the amount of it that exists at the provincial level. The Province of Ontario dictates how the agritourism industry operates more so than any other level of government as it sets the rules and regulations for lower-tier planning to follow. However, the rules and regulations are too stringent in terms of what agritourism operators are allowed to do with their business as well as their own property and, in some cases, not specific enough when it comes to “other” types of agritourism operations. These constraints slow the development process because agritourism operators who attempt the application process are likely to experience difficulty providing new and/or creative products/services for the agritourist community. Most may be denied of their application before they get a chance to execute their idea. Others will likely to become frustrated by the amount of “hoops” they have to jump through, some of which are very costly.

A third finding is the constraints related to marketing. The vast majority of agritourism operations in the Niagara Region remain unknown to agritourists because operators lack either the funds or time to promote their business. Some of them also advertise poorly even if they do possess these luxuries as exemplified by the operator who had to close his B&B in Fort Erie. The interviews revealed it is more common for agritourism operators to experience these constraints if they are not involved in a strategic partnership. Similar findings are noted in Che et al. (2005) as agritourism operators in Michigan, U.S. had trouble marketing because they chose to remain an independent proprietor.

A finding that correlates with the previous is that which relates to strategic partnerships and the value they bring to Niagara’s agritourism industry. Strategic

partnerships proved useful for marketing as demonstrated by the Wineries of NOTL and a local DMO called TVTA. Agritourism operators involved in these partnerships viewed others selling the same product or service as a “colleague” that could be of their assistance. The partners shared resources (i.e. funds, market information, technical skills, and talent) as a means to reach their target market both efficiently and effectively. The ability to collaborate with others gave the partners a competitive advantage because their operations were more likely to be known and/or visited by agritourists than those who marketed alone.

Finally, it is important to mention the success of agritourism operations in the Township of NOTL. Agritourism operations in this municipality are mostly based in wine and grape growing or tender fruits. The owners of operations work diligently with the township to get approvals for their applications. The township is responding by being supportive of agritourism operations. For example, the planner(s) and economic developer(s) made recent amendments to NOTL’s Official Plan so that most agritourism operations can host up to twenty-four special events per year (Interview #3). This amendment proved useful for agritourism operations like Kurtz Orchards as the owners can present agritourists with the opportunity for weddings and other celebrations on their property. It is noted from a participant that multiple wineries also benefited from this amendment as they can host music concerts and other theatrical presentations for agritourists (Interview #3). Another example that demonstrates the Township of NOTL supports agritourism operations is the amendments made to by-law no. 4316AR-13, which allows mobile food trucks on-site (Town of NOTL, 2013b). The participant that mentioned this in his interview stated:

One of the limiting factors for [some] wineries is the fact that they can't really justify having a restaurant because the septic systems they need are fairly significant. So the best option we found for that...are the food trucks. So we've accommodated that through zoning by-laws. We made it clear that at least one food truck might be allowed. I think its once a week they're allowed to have something there as part of the on-going operation and then they can also have a food truck there as part of a special event (Interview #3, p.2-3).

This participant understands that some wineries are not allowed to have a restaurant because of their geographic location in NOTL so he worked with other government officials to provide these operations with an alternative. The amendment somewhat eliminated the disadvantage the wineries were put at as the owners of operation are currently allowed to serve food on-site just like a restaurant. Each example provides evidence that the Township of NOTL is supporting agritourism operations. A supportive municipal government is the primary reason as to why NOTL has produced an agritourism industry that is more successful than other municipalities in the Niagara Region.

It can also be argued that youth retention is another reason why agritourism operations in the Township of NOTL are likely to be successful. The owners of operations in NOTL are able to keep youth on the farm by offering them employment in agritourism activities to which they are interested. For example, a participant described the various job titles that youth are involved in at a winery in this municipality. He states:

“So, when you go up to Ravine [Vineyard Estate Winery] a young person [is] a winemaker [and] a young person [is] a restaurant owner. Yeah, mom and dad own the farm, they own the business, and they developed the business but their kids and their in-laws are involved in the business at a significant level” (Interview #3, p.14).

These offers of employment at Ravine Vineyard Estate Winery are atypical of farming despite the fact that they are located on a farm. They attract youth because they do not

require them to get their hands dirty. They also offer a competitive salary in a specialized field. The youth employed are often good at developing business relationships and possess other entrepreneurial skills, which helps agritourism operations in NOTL stay afloat. Agritourism operations in other municipalities need to find ways to create similar positions so they can retain youth on the farm and, more importantly, increase their likelihood of success.

This conclusion summarized the findings I found to be of significance in this chapter. The findings depict one such version of the current status of the agritourism industry in the Niagara Region. Some of the findings will be readdressed in the following chapter as they serve as a lesson learned from this research and thereby require recommendations.

CHAPTER 5:

PROVIDING RECOMMENDATIONS AND LEARNING FROM MISTAKES

A second goal of this thesis was to identify lessons and provide a set of recommendations that might enhance the future development of the agritourism industry in the Niagara Region. Agritourism development within the Region is underway and several planners mentioned that applications for new types of ventures are common and/or that existing ventures are looking to expand. As such, it is important to try to make this process easier for agritourism operators to apply so they do not encounter a negative experience or have to jump through “hoops” like some of the participants in this study. The purpose of this chapter is to utilize the findings in Chapter Four as a starting point to provide recommendations for agritourism development. The recommendations originated from two sources: participants interviewed and the knowledge I learned in the field as well as my academic career. The chapter begins with an exploration of proactive measures that planners can take to support agritourism. Secondly, marketing-related barriers will be addressed as a recommendation since it seems as though some operations need help with promotion. Educational measures that assist agritourism operators in the start-up or expansion stages of their business serve as a third recommendation. Lastly, this chapter argues that communication is a necessity because operators need to inform agritourists about local products and the various ways buying local helps support operators as well as Niagara’s economy. It is hoped that these recommendations will be implemented in attempt to solve agritourism-related constraints and, more importantly, create a sustainable agritourism destination where operations thrive rather than survive.

5.1. Recommendations

5.1.1. Planning Policies

Planning policies in the Niagara Region do not support agritourism to their fullest. This is because the vast majority of policies are reactive in that they do not take steps to initiate agritourism development and/or rarely provide a definition for agritourism within the plan. It is recommended that planning policies take a more proactive approach if they want agritourism to succeed, especially at the municipal level. Municipalities can begin by specifying what they mean by agritourism in their OPs list of definitions. Next, planners should focus on adding policies that permit on-farm diversified uses like agritourism in prime and good general agricultural land designations, which the PPS recently allowed in its 2014 update under policy 2.3.3.1 (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2014). These policies should be accompanied by those that offer greater support for agritourism. Some examples include: ordinances that allow agritourism operations to host a certain number of community events as long as they are located within an agricultural zone and obtain a permit (University of California Small Farm Program, 2015); updated regulations for specific agritourism activities like roadside stands, wineries (i.e., boutique, farm, estate), farm stays, and educational tours (University of California Small Farm Program, 2015); and an allowance of food trucks in locations where restaurants are not permitted (Town of NOTL, 2013a). Only one municipality has gone to this extent to support agritourism development, which is the Town of NOTL. Other municipalities' planning departments need to follow the proactive approach NOTL has taken if they want agritourism to be part of their economic

development strategy.

5.1.2. Marketing Advice

Marketing is a huge barrier to agritourism development in the Niagara Region that must be addressed. Most operators on the farm lack knowledge of how to promote their product. This results in consumers bypassing operations. It is recommended that agritourism operators find a fairly cheap and effective marketing solution before operations close. One way is to market product by appealing to the emotion of consumers via online platforms like Facebook or a personalized website. A participant in this study provided insight as to how this marketing ploy worked in her favour even though she claims the operation actually has nothing to sell. She states:

We're not really selling anything because we don't make wine. We sell grapes to the wineries to make wine. But what we do have to sell is the story about who we are growing those grapes and we know that people want to know that. People want to get to know the grower. They want to understand what their life is like in their vineyard and so those stories on our website – getting to know the grower – were trying to build a marketing strategy... Not so much tourism but we want the consumers to think about buying a bottle of Ontario wine when they see... Ontario on the bottle and they'll go: "Oh yeah, I know that grape grower. I want to help out" (Interview #18 p.7).

This operation is appealing to emotion by marketing a story about a grape grower and the history of his/her vineyard. It is hoped that consumers will connect to the grower and want to purchase wine that is made from that grower's vineyard specifically. It is not hard for other operations based in tender fruits to replicate this type of marketing as peach or cherry growers can produce a similar story and post it online for free. Operations involved in the production of value-added products like maple syrup and homemade jams or sauces also have the potential to succeed at marketing in this manner.

Another marketing strategy that is recommended is to be a part of the “Eat Local” food movement by advertising local products. “Eat Local” emerged as a reaction to the shift in federal farm policy in the industrialized West in the 1970s as an attempt to (re) connect food producers and food consumers in the same geographic region (Feenstra, 2002). It is an alternative to the global food model and, although buying or eating local is not “new”, the idea has gained momentum in recent years because most consumers do not know the origin of food products or their ingredients. Consumers also frequently associate the word “local” with benefits that improve the economy as well as the health of citizens in a given community (Feenstra, 2002). As such, it is important for agritourism operators in the Niagara Region to utilize this movement to their advantage so that they can sell more produce or, at the very least, attract consumers to their operation.

Agritourism operators can achieve this by placing a sign in front of or a short distance away from their operation that has buzzwords to inform the consumer the product or service is local. Some agritourism operators already do this by advertising words like “tree ripened” and “fresh” (Figure 11a), “family owned and sustainably grown” (Figure 11b), “local” (Figure 11c), and “Niagara” (Figure 11d) on their signs. The operations with these types of signs appeared busier than those with a basic sign or no sign upon touring the Region. It is recommended that operations that do not advertise the word “local” or related words should attempt this as a marketing strategy because it seems to work as a pull factor for consumers. Agritourism operators that already use such words to market should continue since it is helping them sell more produce, specialty goods, or services (depending on the type of operation they offer to consumers).



Figure 11: Roadside stands advertising “Eat Local” food movement A) Sign for on-site farmers market that uses words like tree ripened and fresh to tell customers produce is local B) Sign for roadside stand that uses words like “family owned and sustainably grown” to demonstrate they are local and different from conventional food models C) Roadside stand makes use of words fresh and local D) On-site farmers market sign uses word Niagara to tell consumers product is local (Huellemann, 2015).

The last piece of marketing advice is to become a member of the NSCTA by paying a small fee similar to the price of the TVTA membership. The NSCTA is a DMO that acts on behalf of and in partnership with Niagara’s tourism industry as well as municipal and regional partners to promote (agri) tourism experiences, pursue marketing services, and engage with the RTO so that it includes Niagara’s South Coast⁹ as a travel destination (Niagara’s South Coast, 2015). It is a newer DMO but, unlike the TVTA, it is highly underutilized by agritourism operators since no interview participants provided

⁹ Niagara’s South Coast is inclusive of five municipalities: Fort Erie, Port Colborne, Wainfleet, Welland, and Pelham.

information about the NSCTA or made reference to it as a strategic partner. HorsePlay Niagara in Wainfleet is also the only operation in the agritourism industry that is a member of the DMO (Niagara's South Coast, 2015). As such, it is recommended that agritourism operators join the NSCTA so they can capitalize on the various opportunities the DMO offers to its members. The membership package includes promotion at Information Centers across Ontario, a basic listing on the NSCTA website, listing in the Niagara South Coast Tourism Guide (distributed in racks and given at trade shows), and an opportunity to participate in the brochure distribution program as well as other marketing initiatives that arise on a yearly basis (Niagara's South Coast, 2015). Each of these items in the package has potential to assist agritourism operators in Niagara's South Coast that lack the financials and/or time to market themselves across the province. The membership also has a greater chance of reaching target markets (i.e. agritourists) because it takes a collaborative approach, which makes it more efficient and effective to join than it is to remain a lone wolf.

5.1.3. Education

A third recommendation is education for agritourism operators in the start-up or expansion stages of their business. Education is necessary as interviewees that participated in this study believe operators facing economic circumstances would choose not to engage in agritourism activities because they are confused how to go about it and/or are not confident in their product. For instance, a planner in one municipality stated: "It may be that they're just old school and it's new, it's changed, it's different, it's scary – that's certainly an issue for a lot of people. Or, it may be again they just don't

know how” (Interview #1, p.12). Educating operators, the planner described, can be as simple as delivering workshops that cover a variety of topics, such as customer service, guest-readiness, multi-seasonal business, marketing, insurance, and networking (OCTA, 2013). These workshops can and should be delivered by a neutral source. It is hoped that education in this format will provide farmers with the knowledge they need to develop a successful agritourism operation and/or product or, at the very least, make them aware of the various tasks and challenges they may face before they begin.

5.1.4. Communication

Finally, it is apparent that a lack of understanding exists between agritourism operators and agritourists when it comes to buying local produce. This misunderstanding is most likely to occur at fruit stands or farmers markets as agritourists often try to bargain with agritourism operators for a cheaper price without realizing the impact their dollar has on the operation as well as the local economy. An interview participant made this point when she states:

People don’t realize the impact that spending you money locally has. Spending your money with a farmer is really like five dollars because that money has been reinvested in their staff, their staff spends money locally, and the product is local. It just has such a trickle-down effect. It’s also benefiting me, [for example], because I now have that product. It’s also benefiting the economy so that there [are] more jobs available (Interview #8, p.10).

Open communication between agritourism operators and agritourists can make the impacts the participant suggested known as well as others, such as an improved tax base and responsible use of agricultural lands. Communication can take place at the venue where products are sold or in another location where both parties feel comfortable. This

creates an environment where agritourism operators and agritourists can express themselves and reach a level of understanding about the value of local products. Agritourism operators need agritourists, and agritourists need agritourism operators (depending on the type of activity they wish to pursue). Communication can re-establish this relationship or make it stronger and, at the same time, it can make the impact of local produce known without increasing conflict over price on site.

5.2. Conclusion

The Niagara Region has the potential to further develop as an agritourism destination. Recommendations are provided to assist the industry in becoming or remaining viable in the near future. The recommendations pertain to three groups of stakeholders: government officials, agritourism operators, and agritourists. Government officials (especially at the municipal level) need to be more proactive in supporting agritourism since they have the power to create policies that enable (or discourage) its development and can make the rules and regulations known to operators.

Recommendations for agritourism operators are more practical in that they relate to their ability to develop marketing-related skills or learn about the agritourism industry (before or after they get involved) by taking workshops. Finally, it is recommended that a communicative relationship be developed between agritourism operators and agritourists so that the value of local products is understood before conflicts over price occur on-site. Each of these recommendations developed as a lesson learned from conducting research on agritourism in the Niagara Region. They will be re-addressed with some final thoughts in Chapter Six, which concludes this thesis by providing a summary and

discussing paths future research might take to produce new knowledge that interests rural geographers.

CHAPTER 6:

CONCLUSION

6.1. Summary of Key Arguments

Many small family-owned farms in the Western Hemisphere are increasingly threatened by changes in agriculture. These changes are commonly referred to as “agricultural restructuring” for they shift established patterns of political responsibility and economic development in rural communities towards new directives. Agricultural restructuring is not a new concept – it existed when traditional farms were initially formed and evolved beyond subsistence. However, the rate to which agricultural restructuring occurred increased dramatically when productivism became the dominant agricultural policy trend in the 1940s and more so when neoliberalism and its economic liberalization policies flourished throughout the 1970s. This is because these events forced farmers in rural communities to participate in globalization (and be subject to its influences) since they operate at an international scale. This has had numerous consequences for rural communities, most of which were unintended. For example, rural communities experienced environmental consequences because farmers used agri-chemicals, intensive machinery, and biotechnologies to increase production beyond the needs of the nation-state. Social consequences were present as ties between farmers and local people weakened after face-to-face transactions at the market were replaced by visits to the supermarket. Further, economic consequences were prevalent because multinational agri-food corporations were able to determine the prices paid to farmers since they owned most of the land in rural communities and were a major employer. These are just a few examples of the consequences to which rural communities had no

control over. All of these (and many others) have made it difficult for small family-owned farms to survive. The way people in rural communities looked to adjust themselves (environmentally, socio-culturally, and economically) was by searching for off-farm employment. Engaging in MFA, especially agritourism, was another alternative that helped smooth the adjustment process.

The Niagara Region is a case that has experienced similar misfortune when it comes to small family-owned farms and the extent to which they are threatened by agricultural restructuring. The closure of two food-processing facilities – Cadbury Schweppes and CanGro Foods – in roughly the same year provides evidence of this as many tender fruit farmers lost a buyer for their produce as well as their source of employment. More evidence is shown by the changes to Niagara’s agricultural landscape. For instance, the number of farms declined by 10 percent and the number of farm acres decreased by 8,817 from 2006 to 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2011). This demonstrates that farms in the Niagara Region are becoming increasingly concentrated and are most likely producing a larger amount of crops on a smaller area of land. Government officials in the Niagara Region are responding to the agricultural restructuring process by progressing towards a service-based economy, within which tourism is a key component. In turn, agritourism is one of the many options that are being included in rural development policy at this time.

There is an abundance of questions about agritourism and the extent to which it is unfolding (in a practical sense) throughout the Niagara Region. Most remain unanswered. This thesis begins to bridge this research gap by determining whether agritourism is a viable rural economic development strategy for the Niagara Region to pursue. It does so

by exploring the current status of the agritourism industry in this geographic location. I explored this phenomenon by conducting face-to-face interviews with key informants, such as government officials, agritourism operators, and representatives from local organizations. The findings were presented as either an opportunity or constraint for agritourism development. They display the key informants' thoughts, opinions, and beliefs about this phenomenon as it pertains to rural planning and economic development in the Niagara Region.

Opportunities for agritourism development in the Niagara Region are fourfold. First, many of the agritourism industry's key stakeholders are able to use place-based development strategies effectively. This is a favourable strategy because it relies on assets located within the geographic area to attract agritourists to operations and/or sell product. The assets most commonly used were those that are natural, such as the Niagara Escarpment, the bucolic scenery of the vineyards, and other landscape elements that reflect popular notions of the "rural." A second finding is that which relates to the agritourism operators' knowledge of product and/or service. Many operators recognize that agritourism has evolved into an experience-based industry that features entertainment at most of its venues. This means that agritourism operators are able to identify changes in consumer tastes and preferences and can adjust their business accordingly. If they were unable to do so most operations would be unsuccessful and fall behind. High quality standards are another opportunity that this thesis revealed. I found that the VQA set strict regulations for grape and wine products, which has created world-class wines that are able to compete at a global scale. Agritourism operators similarly create value-added products and/or services of high quality albeit these are more likely to be local when it

comes to sales. Finally, I found that strategic partnerships are of value for agritourism operators in the Niagara Region. Strategic partnerships occur at different levels and within and across municipalities. They are particularly useful for acquiring new skills and resources; however, marketing seemed to be the primary reason for forming a strategic partnership. Each of these opportunities makes the situation in Niagara favourable for agritourism development. They also put individual operations and the industry as a whole in a good position for advancement.

This research also identified six major constraints for agritourism development in the Niagara Region, as seen by the interview participants. Perhaps the most constraining are the regulatory frameworks introduced by the Province of Ontario. The participants in this study view this level of government as being too strict and/or not specific enough when it comes to agritourism operations beyond those involved in wine and grape growing. They argue that these constraints place limits on what agritourism operators are allowed to do with their business as well as their own property. A second constraint relates to marketing. It was found that agritourism operators who are not involved in a strategic partnership are most likely to experience difficulty with promotion and place aspects of the marketing mix. A consequence of this is that a considerable amount of agritourism operations remain virtually unknown to agritourists, including locals. A lack of government support is a third constraint that emerged from this thesis. Participants found this constraint to be problematic for small-scale agritourism operators because they claim to experience a lower application approval rate when they apply for government funding. The participants attribute this finding to the demanding nature of the application process, which is time consuming and difficult to come up with initial fees. The

geography of the Niagara Region is a fourth constraint. It is constraining with respect to physical geography atop the Niagara Escarpment as the soil in this location is of poor quality and restricts agritourism operators to operations that are considered “lower-tier.” Yet another constraint is the amount of competition to which agritourism operators are exposed. The competition is mainly for land because retired urbanites are buying agricultural properties and taking them out of production. However, there is also evidence that competition comes from other external sources, such as grocery store suppliers, the government, and entrepreneurs that invent new products. A final constraint pertains to the inability to retain youth on the farm. Key informant interviews revealed this age group to be disinterested in working on a farm because they do not like to get their hands dirty or can get a better paying job. This seems to be the case for most of Niagara’s municipalities, except the Town of NOTL. Each of these constraints prevents Niagara’s agritourism industry from moving forward in a sustainable fashion. Lessons must be learned from these findings in order to enhance agritourism development in the near future.

It is important to identify lessons to be learned from this case study after exploring the current status of the agritourism industry in the Niagara Region. In this regard, I suggest four key recommendations for the industry’s stakeholders to learn. The first recommendation pertains to municipal planning policies. Interview participants found planning policies in municipal OPs to be unsupportive of agritourism because they are reactive, which means they undergo change only after a significant amount of complaints are registered. Government officials should take a more proactive approach to writing municipal OPs by clearly defining agritourism and incorporating farm diversification

policies in rural and/or agricultural land-use designations. The advantage to this is that it allows government officials to anticipate and plan for agritourism development prior to its happening. A second recommendation applies to marketing. It is apparent that agritourism operators who are not involved in a strategic partnership struggle to grasp promotion and place aspects of the marketing mix. These agritourism operators should make use of one or more of the following marketing strategies: appeal to consumer's emotions, advertise local products/services, or join the NSCTA. Other agritourism operators used these strategies for marketing purposes. They seem to be more successful because they made agritourism operations visible and allowed agritourism operators to experience an increase in sales and attendance levels. Workshop-based education is a third recommendation. It mainly applies to agritourism operators since some of them have expressed they are confused how to start-up (or expand) an agritourism operation or are not confident in what they have to offer. It is recommended that agritourism operators attend workshops prior to getting involved in agritourism so they can learn if it is for them and how to accomplish their goals before they get financially involved. Finally, communication is required to improve the relationship between agritourism operators and agritourists. There is a disconnect between the values these stakeholders put on the cost of goods sold, particularly at farmers markets and roadside stands. It is recommended that these stakeholder groups take the time to openly exchange information about the value-added nature of goods, the impact that buying local has on the economy, and the financial hardship they experience. It may help the stakeholders reach a level of understanding and avoid conflict on-site over price. Following through on these recommendations may enhance the future development of the agritourism industry in the Niagara Region by

increasing the amount of opportunities stakeholders experience or decreasing constraints.

Based on the findings that emerged from both research questions, I argue that agritourism is a viable rural economic development strategy for the Niagara Region to pursue. This argument is justifiable for any type of agritourism operation but especially true for those based in wine and grape-growing. The rationale for this is tied to the fact that wine and grape-growing operations are able to by-pass constraints and experience a greater amount of opportunities because they have immense power. Their power derives from multiple sources, some of which include money, skilled professionals, and time availability. For example, wine and grape-growing operations were able to receive financial support from the government because they had money to hire staff to fill out applications for Growing Forward 2. Wine and grape-growing operations were also able to get money from strategic partnerships they developed, which they used to market their product effectively. These are just a few examples that demonstrate the power of wine and grape growing operations and why agritourism is more likely to be a viable rural economic development strategy for these types of operations in the Niagara Region. This is not to say that agritourism is not viable for other types of operations, such as educational tours, farmers markets, roadside stands, and pick-your-own fruit and vegetable farms. It just means they will have to work harder in order for it to be viable.

6.2. Research Limitations

As explained, this research utilized key informant interviews to determine if agritourism is a viable rural economic development strategy for the Niagara Region to pursue. The interviews were conducted with three stakeholder groups: agritourism

operators, government officials (i.e. planners and economic developers), and representatives from local organizations. They were *not* conducted with agritourists. Che et al. (2006) defines agritourists as “travellers who had, in the previous two years, taken a holiday¹⁰ to engage in such activities as visiting an entertainment farm, staying at a farm or guest ranch, participating in harvest operations and/or picking fruit [or vegetables] at a farm” (as cited in Ainley and Smale, 2010, p. 64). Agritourists are an important group of stakeholders because they provide a clear understanding of consumers and the benefits they seek, which helps agritourism operators develop a product or service that meets (or exceeds) their expectations (Ainley and Smale, 2010). Unfortunately, agritourists that visit the Niagara Region are difficult to contact because it remains unclear as to *who* visits this area for a holiday. For example, most agritourism operators do not record detailed information about agritourists that visit their operation. Those that do are required to keep information confidential or for sales purposes only. General information about agritourists can be obtained through other sources, such as the Travel Survey of Residents of Canada (TSRC) (OMTCS, 2012); however, the TSRC does not provide a list of persons who completed the survey. The TSRC definition of trip also requires that it must be out-of-town and, in addition, for same day trips it has to be at least forty kilometers one-way from the travellers home (OMTCS, 2014). This means that the TSRC does not accurately record information about agritourists who visit the Niagara Region since operations close to home are not considered a trip and, as such, are not reported in the survey. Thus, I chose not to conduct interviews with agritourists because their contact information is difficult to find – it is not publicly available or, so to speak, inaccurate. I

¹⁰There is no specific criterion as to what is considered a holiday. For example, a holiday could be an afternoon or morning outing, a day trip, a weekend, or an extended length of time (i.e. 3+ days) in which a person or group of persons leave their home.

regard that the perspectives and/or viewpoints of these stakeholders would be of value had they been included in this thesis.

6.3. Directions for Future Research

There are several directions for future research as this thesis is one of the first academic works to explore agritourism as a strategy of rural economic development in the Niagara Region. I will focus on two of these directions. Both of them involve changes to the methodological approach.

It is imperative that future research makes use of a multi-methods framework by incorporating focus groups as a second methodology. A focus group is a good way to continue this research after the first stage is completed because it allows for further exploration of the findings that emerged in the key informant interview process. The same participants get another chance to define agritourism and can discuss or contest the opportunities and constraints for its development by socially interacting with others in a group setting (Tonkiss, 2012b). The discussion that develops makes visible how people form and justify their own ideas in relation to others (Tonkiss, 2012b) and, at the same time, *socially* (re) produces new knowledge about this topic. The focus group may either enhance the credibility of previous findings or highlight meaningful inconsistencies between findings produced through different approaches to the same research question (McKendrick, 2009).

A second direction is to conduct a document analysis on regulatory frameworks in the Niagara Region. Regulatory frameworks impact Niagara's agritourism industry (either positively or negatively) for they determine economic development trajectories

and provide policies and objectives to accommodate them. The regulatory frameworks of interest are similar to those mentioned in Chapter Three of this thesis but also include the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* and various municipal plans. A document analysis on these frameworks may help reveal discourse¹¹ and *how* it shapes specific ways of speaking about agritourism or understanding its development (Tonkiss, 2012a). Alternatively, it may reveal key themes that are present (or silenced) in the documents. A document analysis takes a different methodological approach to answering other questions about the agritourism industry in the Niagara Region. It is a good next step to consider.

6.4. Concluding Remarks

This research helped to fill an important gap in rural geography literature as the topic of agritourism has rarely been studied in Canada at the regional scale and/or in the context of rural economic development. It is imperative that this research be continued because the agritourism industry in the Niagara Region is destined to develop beyond its current status and requires further understanding of the opportunities and constraints key informants may experience. For now, those who participated in this research should take advantage of the lessons learned from this case study in order to help rural areas of the Niagara Region develop as a sustainable agritourism destination. They should be reminded the findings presented in this thesis are not generalizable and are, in fact, partial. Nevertheless, this thesis clearly offers much promise to rural communities in the Niagara Region and the like who similarly use agritourism to overcome the effects of

¹¹ A discourse is “a single utterance or speech act (from a fragment of talk, to a private conversation, to a political speech) or to a systematic ordering of language involving certain rules, terminology, and conventions (such as legal or medical discourse)” (Tonkiss, 2012a, p.406).

agricultural restructuring and other exogenous forces, such as globalization.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Dear _____,

I am writing to invite you to participate in a study entitled “Consuming Niagara’s Agricultural Landscapes: A Regional Assessment of the Constraints and Opportunities for Developing a Sustainable Agritourism Destination”. As a graduate student in the Department of Geography at Brock University, I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Christopher Fullerton that examines Niagara’s agritourism industry and its role within the regional economic development process. By exploring the perspectives of agritourism operators and government officials, such as community planners and economic development officers, this project has the potential to build our understanding of opportunities for, and challenges to, tourism-based farm income diversification. Furthermore, this study may also provide lessons for future planning and development activities in Niagara that help strengthen the region’s agritourism reputation and its success as an agritourism destination.

As part of my research, I would like to invite you to participate in a face-to-face interview. This interview would last approximately 30 to 90 minutes and would be arranged at a time convenient to your schedule. The interview questions involve the exploration of issues such as:

- your knowledge of, and thoughts about, changes in Niagara’s agricultural economy;
- your personal experience in dealing with the agritourism development process;
- your views regarding the extent to which planning and development policies are effective measures for improving economic crises, socio-cultural livelihoods, and environmental protection; and
- your perspective about what sorts of planning policies might be ideal for strengthening Niagara’s agritourism reputation and the success of its agritourism businesses.

Please note that, to insure the accuracy of your input, our interview session would be audio recorded. However, you would be provided with a written transcript of our discussion for your review and verification approximately one month after our meeting takes place. Upon completion of this research project (likely around April 2015), you would also receive a written summary of the findings. If you would be interested in acquiring more detail, an electronic copy of the thesis would be made available to you upon request.

In deciding whether or not you wish to participate in this study, please also note that my research findings will be published in my Master’s Thesis and that they may also be disseminated in academic or professional journal articles and/or presented at conferences. Your name will not be used in the publication of the research findings; however, you may

be at risk of identification by your job title (e.g. agritourism operator or government official), which will be published along with a few select quotes from your interview. You should also know that your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary and that you would therefore have the right to withdraw from this study at any time. You may also decline to answer any question(s) in the interview. Furthermore, all the information you provide will be treated as confidential, will be kept in a secure location, and will be confidentially disposed of in June 2015.

Thank you in advance for considering this request. In order to determine if you are willing and able to participate in this study, I will contact you by telephone on or shortly after June 24, 2014. In the meantime, please contact me via email at dh10tx@brocku.ca if you have any questions about this study or require any additional information regarding your participation. You may also direct your questions, concerns, or comments to my supervisor, Dr. Christopher Fullerton in Brock University's Department of Geography. He can be reached by telephone at (905) 688-5550, extension 3487, or by email at chris.fullerton@brocku.ca. I assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance from the Brock University Research Ethics Board (File # 13-224). Accordingly, you may also direct any concerns or inquiries to a Research Ethics Officer in the Office of Research Services at (905) 688-5550, extension 3035.

Thank you in advance for considering this invitation to take part in my research. I look forward to the possibility of meeting with you in the near future to discuss this topic of mutual interest!

Sincerely,

Denyelle Huellemann
Graduate Student
Department of Geography
Brock University

Christopher Fullerton
Associate Professor
Department of Geography
Brock University

Appendix 2

Agritourism Operator Interview Guide

1. For how many years has your farm been in operation?
2. In your opinion what have been some notable changes in Niagara's agricultural economy since you started farming?
3. What type of agritourism products does your farm have to offer?
4. What is the motivation for pursuing agritourism operations on your farm?
5. Can you describe for me your experience with agritourism thus far?
6. What are your thoughts about the state of agritourism across the Niagara region, more generally?
7. In your opinion, what ingredients are necessary to create a successful agritourism venture?
8. What are some challenges you face as an agritourism operator in the Niagara region?
9. Are you aware of any government policies or programs that are in place to help agritourism ventures such as yours succeed?
10. Do you feel that these policies and programs are effective or that there should be better policies and programs put in place? If others should be put into place, how might they best help agritourism operators such as yourself?
11. What types of agritourism ventures are considered your largest competition?
12. Are you involved in any strategic alliances, other partnerships that involve working with other agritourism operators, or other groups to promote your business venture? If so, would you mind sharing some information about how those work?
13. From your perspective, would you say that cooperative approaches, such as a strategic alliance, can strengthen an area's agritourism reputation and the success of its agritourism businesses?
14. What future do you see for agritourism in the Niagara Region?
15. If you don't mind me asking, approximately what percentage of your farm income is generated by your agritourism operations?
16. Why do you think that many farmers who are facing challenging economic circumstances have chosen not to engage in agritourism activities as a way of generating more income?

Appendix 3

Government Officials Interview Guide

1. For how many years have you worked as a government official in the Niagara Region?
2. From your perspective, how has Niagara's agricultural economy changed over the course of your employment?
3. In your assessment, what is the status of Niagara's agritourism industry?
4. In your opinion, what are Niagara region farmers' motivations for pursuing agritourism opportunities?
5. In your opinion, what ingredients are necessary to create a successful agritourism venture?
6. What areas throughout Niagara would you consider to have the most potential for agritourism development?
7. In your opinion, are there particular types of agritourism ventures that have greater chance of success than others?
8. What do you think are some of the challenges that agritourism operators face in the Niagara Region?
9. Are you aware of any government policies or programs that are in place to help the Niagara Regions agritourism ventures succeed? Do you feel that these policies and programs are effective or that there should be better policies and programs put in place? If others should be put into place, how might they best help agritourism operators?
10. From your perspective would you say that cooperative approaches, such as strategic partnerships, can strengthen an area's agritourism reputation and the success of its agritourism businesses?
11. What future do you see for agritourism in the Niagara Region?
12. If you don't mind me asking, approximately what percentage of your municipality's farm income is generated by agritourism operations?
13. Why do you think that farmers who are facing challenging economic circumstances have chosen not to engage in agritourism activities as a way of generating more income?